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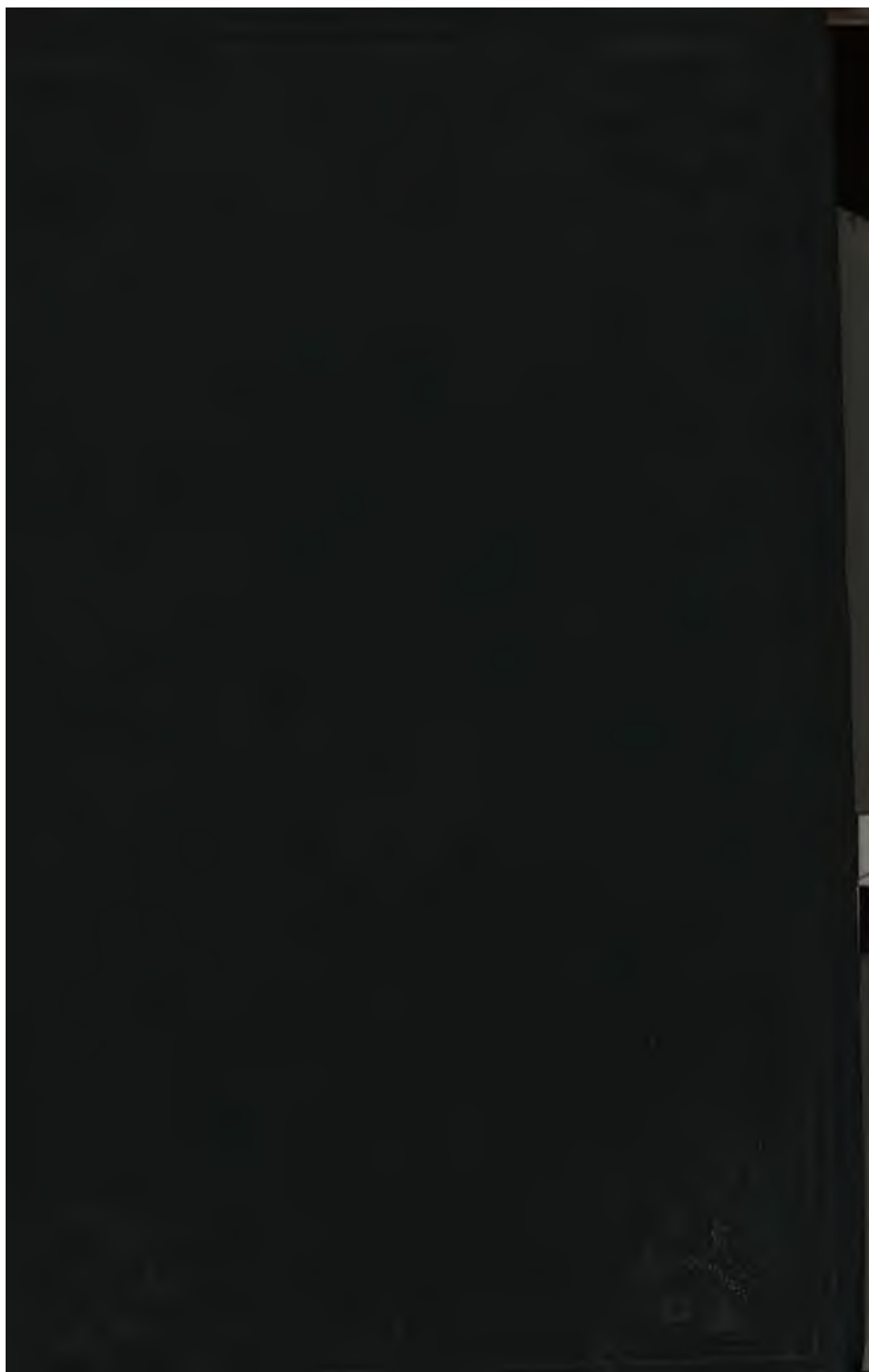
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# **HAUNTED LIVES.**

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**VOL. II.**



# HAUNTED LIVES.

J. Nobel.

BY

J. S. LE FANU,

AUTHOR OF

"UNCLE SILAS," "A LOST NAME," ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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# HAUNTED LIVES.

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VOL. II.

whom he had no difficulty in recognising as Mr. Dacre.

"Oh, Mr. Mannering!" he said, raising his hat, and his handsome features smiling in the moonlight, looked as if they were fashioned of ivory.

"Pray come in. I hope you did not call while I was out? I should have waited here, but business compelled me to go out for a time," said Charles Mannering, surprised into politeness and I fear a momentary disregard of truth.

"Thank you. No, I did not call—in fact I could not—until now. So fortunate to have met you."

As he now stood, in the light of the room, face to face, Charles Mannering confessed to himself, with a twinge of chagrin, what a very handsome fellow Dacre unquestionably was.

"You were so good as to say you would give me some information when we met," said Dacre after they had talked a little. "The subject of course is——"

"The anonymous correspondence with

which Miss Gray has been so shamefully annoyed. It's a mere burlesque, but it is not less an annoyance." And he went on to recount all that Miss Gray had related, and particularly the threat of sending her Mr. Dacre's hand, at which Charles laughed heartily, and the handsome Mr. Dacre laughed also, but not so comfortably, looking at his slender hand and wrist, which he moved under his eye, as if measuring in his mind whereabouts the line of amputation would be traced.

"Very laughable, but very curious; I'll tell you how just now," said he. "But I hope so much Miss Gray does not mind it."

"The whole thing worries and frightens her. I don't think she believes all that; but she is nervous and uncomfortable."

"It can't be otherwise," said Dacre; "and I'm afraid she suffers even more than she need."

"I'm thinking of applying to the police about it," said Charles Mannering.

Dacre shrugged—



"I can't help it if you do; but the whole thing falls through—mind, I tell you that, and I know more about it than I did yesterday. It would be the greatest pity in life to let those miscreants off."

"You seem to think rather seriously of it," said Charles.

"I have reason," said Dacre, with a faint smile. "You are advising Miss Gray in this miserable business?" he asked gently but suddenly.

"I can hardly say advising, because it seems to me that for the present she has made up her mind to do nothing. I undertook her little message to you, in Lord Ardenbroke's absence—as a friend of yours he would have naturally undertaken it."

"He is out of town, then?"

"Yes—likely to remain away for some weeks," said Charles Mannering.

"Yes; Ardenbroke and I were very intimate long ago. He knows everything about me. We Dacres are a scattered family. You are aware that this little visit of mine to London is made under peculiar

circumstances. I'm under a condition which embarrasses me extremely. I undertook it entirely to oblige other people ; but it prevents my putting myself in the way of recognition. My little mission—a labour of love—would be spoiled entirely if I declared myself. As it has turned out, I am sorry I accepted the condition. If I were in a position to avow myself, I would act with infinitely more decision—infinity ; but without what would now amount to cruelty to others—a terrible disappointment in fact, and something amounting, after all the trouble I've submitted to, and the condition of reserve, to *ridicule*, as respects myself—I hope in a week, certainly in a fortnight, it will be at an end, and then you will quite understand ; you will see clearly how I was circumstanced. No one was ever by nature so little qualified to maintain a mystery, and I assure you it is the most irksome thing I ever undertook. I did not think it would have lasted a week altogether, and I find myself already a fortnight under my incognito, and likely to continue so for as much

longer. If I were relieved of it, I could be of very great and immediate use."

"It's a great pity you can't," said Charles.

"Yes," said Dacre, "but apart from cruelty, to declare myself at this moment would make me ridiculous, and of course I could not think of doing it—Honour—yes, honour—God bless it—we all respect and wish it well; but honour, as you'll see in a few days, has nothing to do with this question of 'reserve or no reserve;' to declare myself has nothing to do with honour, but it would have a very distinct connexion with absurdity, and that fantastic spirit, ridicule, is the scourge of mankind. There are degrees, you know. Honour stands high; we sacrifice our lives to honour, but honour sometimes to fortune, and fortune itself at times to ridicule. Ridicule, therefore, sits supreme: no thunder so stunning as its titter, no tropical lightning like the half-hidden gleam of its eye, no crashing hurricane like its whisper. You've found it so, and so did I, and so does all the world. Pray forgive my interruption—talking nonsense while weighty



matters call you away—" he glanced at the papers on the table, "so, with many apologies, I'll say good-night."

With a smile he was about to turn to the door, but Charles Mannering interposed—

"Pray, one word more. You used the phrase curious ; you said that this affair was very curious, you recollect, and you were good enough to say you would tell me how by-and-by."

"Oh? a little curious naturally yourself."

Mr. Dacre smiled, and returned a step or two to the table.

## CHAPTER II.

### ONE—TWO—THREE.

“Yes,” continued Mr. Dacre, “I’ll tell you why I said it was curious. It was *apropos* of that part of your story which recounted the threat in the letter, which promised to send, as a present to Miss Gray, my poor hand, made up in lint. It is highly melodramatic, and even comical; but it is also curious, because I was fired at last night.”

“Fired at? Really! Are you serious?”

“Quite serious, although, perhaps, the subject is a little ridiculous; because I do believe if they had shot me, from what I have reason to know of them, if they are the villains I suspect, this hand of mine would have been left at the door of Guildford House, precisely as they promised, this evening.”

“Surely you have taken some steps—I should certainly acquaint the police,” said Charles, incredulous, but still a good deal shocked.

“Very kind of you, but it is already done—there is no objection to that. They don’t know that I connect them with the attempt. What I must conceal is the fact that I have got a clue by which I may yet reach them with certainty.”

“How was this attempt made, Mr. Dacre—where did it happen?”

“I’ll tell you. Do you know a road near Islington, where they are building a church or a meeting-house—a large place of worship, with three great trees growing in a clump beside it? There is a dead wall opposite, and a portion of the building has hardly risen above the foundations. I had driven to a place called Duckley-row, close to that, to see an accountant on business for a few minutes. As I got out of my cab, I saw some one get out of another, on the other side of the street, and he walked slowly up and down as if looking for a par-

ticular house. That is all I recollect of him. He was so employed when I went into Mr. Edgecombe's house."

"You did not see him fire at you?"

"I could not say whether it was he. I have only that unreasoning, intuitive belief, on which all my life I have so much relied, that it was the same man, that he was there watching me, and that he waited for, followed, and fired at me when I came out."

"How did it happen, exactly?"

"The road in front of the building I've mentioned is very much cut up, with very deep ruts, so I told the driver to take his cab down and wait for me about fifty yards beyond it, where the trees are. As I reached the front of the building I was fired at, and a bullet struck the road a few yards before me. I turned about and saw the flash of a second shot which passed over my shoulder, close by my head."

"How far away?"

"I should say about five-and-thirty yards. The shot came from the field close by the road, and over the fence, and that

part of the road was in deep shadow. I was going on at a good pace, and picking my steps, zig-zag, and this it was, I think, that saved me."

"It could not have been a pistol at that distance," said Charles.

"Quite too far, too much force, too loud a report, and a devilish stinging whistle by my ear. No one but a muff would have tried a pistol at that distance. I had one then, I have one now"—he lifted a revolver from his coat pocket—"but I did not think of using it at thirty yards. I ran back to have my chance at close quarters, but he had run for it, and so I returned with my hand in my pocket, and not in that of Miss Gray's correspondent. Will you kindly tell Miss Gray that I have better hopes than ever of bringing those villains to justice, or at least to submission; and I really must say good night at last; good night."

Charles Mannering accompanied him to the door, holding a candle.

"Don't mind, pray don't," said he.

But Charles was determined to be polite,



and he saw, leaning with his back to the wall, a small man with a loose black wrapper about him, and a low-crowned felt hat. He seemed to have been waiting for Mr. Dacre, and he had taken up a position on the lobby between his door and the descending flight of stairs.

"More than fifteen minutes waiting; you said, 'twouldn't be five," said this figure, snarling with something of the peculiar intonation of the Jewish race.

Charles thought he saw Mr. Dacre make a slight gesture of caution, but his back was turned and he was moving towards this discontented person, while at the same time Mr. Dacre said quietly, "That's right—a cab waiting? Do you get on and see."

The little man in the black wrapper, Charles felt, looked at him from under the leaf of his broad hat, before running downstairs, which he did without saying another word. He thought this person was affecting to be a servant, a character which Dacre seemed to put upon him, and so, he first

and Dacre following, they went down the stairs. Charles Mannering stepped to the window on the lobby, and looking out saw these two persons walking side by side, as it seemed in confidential talk, toward the Temple-bar entrance of this series of quadrangles. He made up his mind to join them, got his hat in a moment, and shutting the door, ran downstairs. Here was, perhaps, some light to be had upon the right reading of Mr. Dacre's mystery. He would go boldly up and join him, he did not care a farthing what he thought. He owed a duty to his cousin—second or third we must allow, but still his kinswoman—Miss Laura Gray, and every material for conjecture was valuable.

They must have quickened their pace very much, however, for they had already got out of sight. Following the direction they had taken, on entering the next square, he saw *three* persons walking rapidly into that which lay beyond it. In two of these he thought he recognised Dacre and the little man in the loose black coat; but

they had got round the corner too quickly, and were too far away for certainty.

Charles had got into the spirit of the chase, and—shall I tell it?—he actually ran a part of the diagonal distance in hopes of overtaking them. He was saved from an awkward success, however, by the speed with which the shorter distance was traversed by these three persons, and he got in time to the lamp near Temple-bar to see a cab door shut, and Dacre, from the window, smiling a farewell to him, and his hand waving as it drove away. He would have liked to pursue, but there was no cab at hand, and a moment after he bethought him how unwarrantable and even outrageous his pursuit would have been, and returned to his rooms, recovered from his momentary intoxication, and very well pleased that he had failed.

---

## CHAPTER III.

### AN INVALID.

DACRE sat back in the cab, the sole of one foot on the edge of the opposite cushion. The little man in the black wrapper sat beside him, and opposite that unknown person sat a burly gentleman, with broad shoulders and a florid face, and an expression of sly self-confidence.

It was the pleasure of Mr. Dacre to be silent, and these gentlemen, as in the presence of one of superior rank, when they spoke together, did so in an under tone, advancing their heads.

At last Mr. Dacre, no doubt amused by his ruminations, burst into a sarcastic laugh, which having indulged without vouchsafing any explanation to his companions, who

seemed to count for next to nothing, he relapsed into silence.

This silence lasted till they had nearly reached St. Paul's Churchyard, when Mr. Dacre produced a cigarette, and with a laconic "Light, please," procured from the little person beside him that necessary appliance.

The cigarette did not last long, and when it was expended he looked, for the first time, out of the window.

"Is it far to this house?" he asked of anyone who might please to answer.

"Quite near," said the little man at his elbow.

He continued to look listlessly from the window, humming an air. They had turned up, to the left, a street near Cheapside.

"If it's much further, you may go on, gentlemen, if you like, but I shall leave you and go home."

The cab drew up, however, almost as he spoke.

"This is it—here's the house," which he pronounced *oushe*.

"You'd better go and try whether he can see us," said Dacre, in the same careless, haughty way.

Out got the little man; the door was already open, and he asked the dowdy maid who stood by it—

"How is Mr. Gillespie to-night?"

"Poorly, sir."

"Well enough to see us, do you think—two gentlemen with me—expecting us—eh?"

"Didn't hear, sir."

"You know me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I'll go up and ask him how he does."

He went to the cab window first.

"She says he's ailing," said the little man at the window. "Shall I run up and see?"

"Are you sure it's only gout?"

"That's the ticket—gout it is."

"Well, tell him he'd better see me *now*, for I'm hanged if I come here again."

And Mr. Dacre leaned back again in his

cab, and waited silently for the return of the little gentleman in the black wrapper.

"He'll do himself that honour," said the little man, in a tone of ceremonious banter, himself opening the cab-door for Mr. Dacre, who jumped out and ran up the steps, followed by the gentleman in black, and the athletic gentleman with the florid face and broad shoulders.

"He says two of us is as much as he can stand," said the little man to the sly philanthropist, who thereupon nodded, and disengaging a short pipe from his pocket, enjoyed a smoke before the steps.

The little gentleman in black being more at home than his companion, led Mr. Dacre upstairs, and knocking at the drawing-room door, introduced him.

Mr. Gillespie was seated in an easy-chair, with his hand in flannel, and a table with several phials and a table-spoon, with a drop of some undesirable fluid drying in its hollow.

The invalid was that gentleman with a long, square head and white hair whom we

saw before in the same box with Mr. Dacre at the opera.

"Can't get up, sir, to receive ye—laid here, sir—in tether—gout—nae respecter o' persons—ye'll excuse me."

"I'd rather you didn't under any circumstances. I hate a fuss," said Dacre, taking a chair. "I shouldn't think of treating you with any ceremony."

"Ye'r right, sir, ye'r verra right—we'll go straight to the point, sir—each wi' other—and what for no?" said the old gentleman drily, with a little wag of his head. "Ye might a fetched lawyer Larkin here, too, for 'twas after his pipe the jig began. I'd a liked verra well to see him here."

"I think there are quite enough here as it is," said Mr. Dacre, "unless, as Mr. Larkin is so religious, you might have enjoyed his conversation in your present invalided state."

"Never you fash your beard about that," said Mr. Gillespie, who, in his sick-room and gouty collapse, was talking in the broad Scotch of his early days. "I'll do weel



enough. I had enough and mair o' that sort o' claverin in my young days, in Glasgow, to last me the leave o' my years—d——them ! I tell ye, sir, there's mair hypocrisy and downright wickedness comes o' their cant and rant, and Sabbath rules, than is to be found in the same compass in a' the world beside. But there's not much amiss wi' me. Ye'r not to suppose I'm coming out o' this feet foremost. I'll be all right again, mon, in nae time,—only a touch o' the gout—deil gae wi't."

"Now, Mr. Gillespie, you give me the paper," said Dacre. "It's growing late."

"H'm ! Well, I've been thinking o' that," said the invalid.

"So have I," said Mr. Dacre.

"And it's all settled," interposed the little gentleman in black, with a surly and pallid face, and prominent dark eyes.

"An' what for no ? Why deil flee awa' wi' ye, mon, d'ye think, loss or no loss, I'd think o' backing out o' my bargain ; na, na, Mr. L. But this I say, sir, it's a very great confidence and a trust I would na' think o'

placing if 'twere na' for the undoubted respectableness o' the party; ye ha' known me a long time, sir, and I think ye'll say I've been of use to you on occasion."

"You let me and Ardenbroke—I wonder he didn't recognise you the other evening—into two or three very profitable speculations."

The invalid chuckled cynically at these words, looking at the label of his medicine bottle, which he turned slowly about in his fingers.

"Ye'll be meaning that Hotel thing, and that silver mine; well, that's a gude wheen years bygane," said he, turning on a sudden a little angrily on the young gentleman, and fixing his shrewd and grim eyes from under their white penthouse upon the young man, while he still held the phial up between his finger and thumb.

Mr. Gillespie had a temper which he was now rich enough, on occasion, to indulge.

"Why, if ye play at bowls, you'll meet with rubbers," interposed the little man hastily. "My governor was in that himself

and got out of it bad enough, and it's more than ten years ago."

"Ten years or twa, it don't matter, we've heard o'er much o' that; folk must creep before they gang; every man must win his ain experience, sir; wise men could not pick up money if there were no fules to throw it about. I always said, a mon must use his brains, and what's their proper object but the fules that Providence throws in his way? Dang me, sir, life's a game like ony ither; if I leave a blot, and the dice serve, ye'll hit it, and what for no? And if ye do the same—I'm talking too much; this 'ill not serve my hand."

"No, nor your head. Can't you let a thing pass?" urged Mr. Levi.

"It's all right enough," said Mr. Gillespie, looking at his large gold watch which lay upon the table. "It's time I should have them drops; I'll ask you for them, Mr. L.; will ye measure two o' they spoonfuls into that glass?—and—we'll let byganes be byganes, sir, and I drink to ye," he added, facetiously, with a nod to Mr. Dacre.

"And now that you are at leisure, Mr. Gillespie, we'll exchange papers, please, and I shall go."

The old gentleman signed to Levi, who seemed familiar with the arrangements of his room, to bring him his desk.

"'Tis not one man in a thousand I'd do it for," muttered Gillespie, as he handed it to Mr. Dacre, who placed it beside a counterpart which he took from his coat pocket. The writing was very short; the comparison hardly lasted two minutes, and he signed one which he handed to Mr. Gillespie, and placed in his pocket the other bearing that gentleman's signature, and some other signatures beside.

"Good night, sir," said Mr. Dacre, walking out of the room, followed by Mr. Levi.

When they reached the landing Mr. Dacre paused. The hall-door was half open, and they could see the companion they had left outside, walking to and fro beside the cab, smoking.

"I've a mind to drive out to Brompton. We don't want that great, hulking

fellow any more; we'll send him off—eh?"

He glanced at his watch.

"Hullo! later than I thought—no, I shan't mind," and Dacre jumped into the cab.

---

## CHAPTER IV.

### A CONFERENCE.

WHILE Dacre was resolving, for reasons of his own, against visiting Guildford House for some time longer, Charles Mannering was making his way there in a cab.

It was ten o'clock when he ran up the stairs to the drawing-room. The ladies had already gone to their rooms, and he found the servant on the point of putting out the candles.

"Will you tell Miss Gray's maid, please, that I have come, and that I should be glad to know whether Miss Gray would prefer seeing me now, or would rather wait to hear my news till I come in the morning?"

Before another minute had passed Miss Gray was in the drawing-room, and, after a hasty greeting, he related his interview with

Dacre. The incident which involved an attack upon his life, however, he postponed telling. Perhaps he thought it might alarm her ; perhaps he did not care, without sifting evidence a little more, unduly to elevate her hero.

"Your friend, Mr. Dacre, puzzles me," said Charles. "I don't exactly know what to make of him."

"I don't understand your difficulty," answered she.

"I don't quite understand it myself," he replied. "The fact is, it has been culminating. All along there has seemed to me something more enigmatical about him than is accountable by a mere temporary secrecy."

"Yes, of course there is, because we don't know the causes and conditions of his concealment."

"It is something more—it is something quite indefinable in his manner, but which at times strikes one with a chill of suspicion. I felt it the very first time I saw him, as I looked at him through my glass while he

talked with Ardenbroke, and afterwards to that old gray-headed man at the opera, and I felt it again to-night."

His eyes met Laura's as he said this; pale, with an odd smile, her eyes were fixed upon him with a painful inquiry; had she experienced the same repulsion mingling with as mysterious a fascination?

"One always does connect the idea of insecurity with secrecy," she said, averting her eyes. "But is not that very unjust—obviously unfair? It must be so, if secrecy can ever be justifiable."

"Yes, so it would appear; yet there seem to be certain ambiguities with which nature or providence, call the power how we may, has associated in our imaginations the idea of what is deadly and perfidious."

"Yes, in our imaginations; but we must not be governed altogether by that faculty," said the young lady.

"I fancied it your favourite faculty!"

"How so?"

"Why, you profess yourself a creature,



not of reason, but of instinct, and the imagination is the seat of instinct."

"You are growing too metaphysical for me—a great deal. Justice is one of our instincts, and justice says very plainly that it would be wrong to condemn any one simply because he chose to be private and unobserved."

Charles Mannering laughed, but there was some little tinge of reproach in the tone in which he said—

"I wonder, Challys, whether, under any circumstances, you would take the trouble to plead my cause as well?"

"Come, Charley, I wont have this. You have been very sensible up to this; why should you on a sudden break down so lamentably, and insinuate that I, the most honest friend in the world, am not reliable? If you say another word of the kind, I have done with you. But have you no better reason for your misgivings about Mr. Dacre? It seems almost a perfidy to ask it, but you and I have known one another so long, and so well."

“He laughed again a little sadly, and said he—

“It appears odd to me that he should give as his address a place where he does not live; that he should defer his visit to me until the hour at which he usually calls here, although his excuse for coming here so late is, that his business keeps him in the country to that hour; and he told you, you say, that he had abandoned that business for the present, in order to devote himself to the prosecution of this affair. Then, when I came to the door of my chambers, to let him out, there was a companion—a very odd-looking person—waiting on the lobby for him, and I detected a sort of signalling from Dacre, I fancied, to warn that person that he was over-heard, and in fact it struck me so oddly that I followed him downstairs, and I found that in the next court they were joined by a third person, and they walked on abreast so rapidly that I could not overtake them, but as I reached the street Dacre from a cab window nodded and smiled to me, and they drove away together.”

"I can see nothing in all that at all inconsistent with his representations."

"There is no such conflict of course as would hang him—no actual conflict; but I could not doubt that the persons who joined him were not gentlemen, and there is, I think, a kind of shock in discovering that sort of association; and all I know is, that the whole thing has left on my mind a most uncomfortable uncertainty."

"It is not pleasant, in such an anxiety as I am, to have one's uncertainties aggravated, and I do think wantonly," said Miss Laura Gray, very unreasonably. "And Mr. Dacre is just the kind of person—we can't be blind to the fact that he *is* unusually elegant and graceful—to make others who happen to be placed beside him look very much more the reverse than they really are; and I don't think there is anything worth a thought in all this; and it does not even make me feel the least uncomfortable, which perhaps is disappointing."

Miss Challys Gray was very near kindling into one of her indignations.

Charles smiled and shook his head a little, looking almost sad on her pretty face.

"You smile; you're very odd, certainly," mused Miss Gray, passionately; "just because you see me very much in earnest, I wonder what pleasure you can find in trying to make me believe you think me a fool?"

"No, I've told you a thousand times, I think you very clever, on the contrary; if you repeat the accusation I'll say you do so only to make me repeat my poor testimony. If I smile, Challys, it is partly at your character, which also I admire, and partly at my own folly, which I deplore, but cannot cure; and so, having detained you too long, I'll say good night."

"You'll come again in the morning—wont you?"

"Yes, certainly; I'm always quite at your command; it is one of my happiest hours that is spent in executing your commissions—so never spare me."

"A thousand thanks, Charlie, you're so good-natured. Then I will say good-night

now ; and you'll not forget us in the morning ?”

So they parted. She heard him get into his cab, and drive away. She raised the window and looked out, and round and down the once more silent avenue.

She sighed as she drew back her pretty head.

“Poor Charlie ! he’s sometimes so high-flown ; he talks of his folly, and thinks himself so wise, and he’s such a good creature.”

She looked up at the stars and smiled, and looked somehow oddly pleased, and then, with a little sigh, she turned away and ran up the stairs.

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## CHAPTER V.

### A DRAWING-ROOM CONTROVERSY.

“I DON’T think there is anything worth a thought in all this, and it does not even make me the least uncomfortable,” Miss Challys Gray had said ; but she had spoken in her haste ; it did make her uncomfortable, and *that* it was, perhaps, which had vexed her.

In the morning, however, came a pleasant note from Mr. Dacre. It was expressed in these terms :—

“MY DEAR MISS GRAY,—I have every hope that I shall have very important news to tell you when I have next the pleasure of seeing you. I don’t yet comprehend the plot, but I can already identify, I think, at least some of the plotters. Such a gang of

wretches ! I have been compelled to make some extremely odd acquaintances, and to revive a not very desirable old one, in the course of my inquisition. From one I have just extracted a note, which I shall ultimately use as an instrument to compel a complete confession, and thus bring the conspiracy to its knees. I saw your friend Mr. Mannering, yesterday evening, at his chambers, but had nothing very particular to tell, except my ugly little adventure at Islington, which, perhaps, he related to you. After I had obtained my first success yesterday evening, with the paper in my pocket by which I hope to carry my point, I had just made up my mind—but changed it on good grounds—to run out to Guildford House, and, late as it was, to implore a few minutes ; but it was too late, and there were other reasons, as I have said, for delay.

“ Believe me, my dear Miss Gray,

“ Ever yours very truly,

“ ALFRED DACRE.”

When Charles came that day as he had

promised, she did not care to show him this note. She simply told him that she had received a line which explained everything, and related how.

"But," she said, "he mentions an adventure which happened to him at Islington. What was it?"

Charles Mannering was a little put out; but he rallied, and told the story.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed with a gasp when he had done. "And how did you come not to tell me all that before?"

"I can't exactly say; but two reasons, I am sure, contributed. In the first place, I suspect there is exaggeration or mistake; and, in the next, I see no possible good in frightening you by such a story, whether true or false. Of course, it tends to make Mr. Dacre more interesting, and that is motive enough for him; but I am certain that any one who cares for you will say I acted kindly, as I think Mr. Dacre would have done, in allowing that story to continue untold for a little longer."

"I don't agree with you," she said; "I



ought to have heard it. There is no room for mistake about such a thing, nor for exaggeration, that I can see; either it happened or it didn't; of course, it is easy for any one to tell wilful untruths; and I don't suspect him of that, any more than you do, I know; but you don't like him."

"I don't like people I know nothing about—that's very true," acquiesced Charles.

"You know quite well what I mean: I mean, you hate him," she said.

"No," he laughed. "No, I assure you, I don't hate him; but I think he's made too much of. I think he has been allowed to thrust or to insinuate himself into a position to which, I think, he has no earthly claim."

Miss Laura Gray smiled a little disdainfully, and turned away to her flowers in the window.

Charles, of course, saw that smile, understood its meaning perfectly, and winced under it.

"I don't think any unworthy motive has helped me to my opinion of Mr. Dacre. I

don't hate him, and I don't like him. I think, I may say, I *dislike* him."

Hereupon Miss Gray raised her pretty eyebrows a little, turning towards him with a smile, and made him the faintest little courtesy in the world, and then smiled diligently at her flowers; and he could only see her long eyelash as she looked down at them, re-arranging them with her delicate fingers in the tall, old china vases in which we see them painted in dark Dutch pictures.

"Yes, I think I may say, I dislike him," continued Charles, defiantly, but coolly. "I am certain he is conceited; his countenance inspires no confidence. I fancy him giddy, selfish, and violent—you like instinct, and I am giving it to you—I fancy him all that; and I think him quite capable of telling fibs, or selling a friend a bad horse at a good price, or anything else of the kind."

"But is not that merely supposing him a man?" suggested Miss Gray.

Without noticing, however, this query, Charles Mannering went on with his confession.

"I don't say it's charitable; but there are a great many opinions that are neither charitable nor *uncharitable*—that are, in fact, simply just. Ardenbroke knows him, I dare say, and even likes him in a kind of way, as he must do a great many agreeable fellows of the same kind; but that means, as a clever girl like you must suppose, and as every man knows, very little indeed. I say there is something in him that inspires distrust. I don't like him; on the contrary, I dislike him, and I am quite determined I'll make out everything about him."

"That will task your ingenuity, wont it?" she said gently. "I am rather curious myself; but I don't expect to hear till he chooses."

"Which may be never," said Charles. "I shan't wait."

"I don't object," said Miss Gray; "only let us be quite distinct on this point. Remember, I have nothing whatever to do with it. I am quite satisfied; in fact, I should think myself extremely impertinent, to say nothing worse, if I were to engage in

any such inquiry respecting a person who has been so kind, and who is, after all, a mere acquaintance, and whom I know to be a friend of Ardenbroke's."

"I'm glad you have no objection."

"I can have no objection to your doing anything you please, on your own account, provided it does not affect me," said Miss Gray.

"He says he has a taste for being a detective. I don't say I have quite that, but, I dare say, when occasion requires, I can be just as sharp as he. My inquiries shall be made in a direct and fearless way. I shan't act like a detective—that is not usual—but I'll learn something about him, and if no one knows such a person I shall make my own inferences."

"Take care, Charlie, for he has been living abroad, and people are duellists there still."

"You laugh at me as if you thought I wasn't in earnest. I promise you I'll bring you news of him."

"Very good—only again remember I did

not send you. In fact, I don't see any reasonable ground for pursuing him with inquiries, and there are many obvious reasons against doing so; and I still think it was very odd your not telling me a word of that really frightful adventure at Islington."

"I am sorry my reasons didn't satisfy you—a cracker or a sixpenny cannon very likely—but we can't, in the present state of evidence, agree on a single point about this interesting person. When a little more light comes perhaps we shall."

"Perhaps so," said Miss Gray.

He fancied, I think, that he had alarmed her by threatening inquiry, but she was really amused, for I think she suspected a motive.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE SYNAGOGUE.

MR. DACRE did not come that night, nor his "hand," as Charles Mannering learned on making polite inquiry about the promised parcel, nor any word or sign to show people at Guildford House that he was living. No note reached Charles Mannering's chambers — no call was made there by the object of his suspicions.

But on the day following an odd little note reached Challys Gray from her persistent correspondent, Mr. Dacre. It said :—

"MY DEAR MISS GRAY, — Don't be alarmed, neither suppose that you shall have any trouble whatever in consequence, but you must aid me in identifying a malefactor! an opportunity occurs to-morrow

(Friday). You, who enjoy good music, have you never heard the Jewish service performed at the synagogue in Mortlake-street, in the City? On that evening, pray attend at a quarter-past eight o'clock. I enclose a note, which will secure a good place for you and Mrs. Wardell. You will be placed in the gallery near the stair at the great entrance. At the opposite end of the building will be, in a railed enclosure, in what I shall call the aisle, five singers, who will walk after an officer of the synagogue to the eastern end during the course of the service, and back again. Of these, two will be tenors. You will have an opportunity of observing their faces. Do so, and kindly tell me if anything very particular strikes you in either. Unless something quite unforeseen should happen I shall be there myself, and hope for a word at your carriage window before you leave. Pray do not fail. Your going there will decide a point which at present perplexes me. Everything waits upon it. Pray do not refuse. The worst that can befall you is to hear some fine music without

effecting anything more important. On the other hand, you may throw a flood of light upon the darkness that baffles me.

“Confiding in your good sense and spirit, I am sure you will make the effort. I have the honour of knowing those attributes too well to doubt it. If I write too boldly pray attribute my rashness to my zeal, and forgive me. Believe me, my dear Miss Gray, ever yours most truly,

“ALFRED DACRE.

“P.S.—I forgot to say the gallery is exclusively for ladies.”

Here, then, was an adventure. Her drive she had daily. Shopping and all that. Intolerably dull the routine had become. But this excursion was something quite new. To penetrate the City; to sit in a Jewish synagogue and hear their worship and their chanting; and all with a purpose so strange, and even interesting, was quite charming; so thought Miss Gray, and perhaps the thought of that word at the carriage window, and the great eyes of her *preux chevalier*



looking in, contributed something to the interest of the anticipation. She ran into the drawing-room where Mrs. Wardell sat, and, said she—

“Julia, I am going to introduce you to a new religion.”

“What on earth does the mad-cap mean?” exclaimed the old lady, laying down her crochet, and raising her spectacles.

“Yes, you and I shall be Jewesses, and I’ve made up my mind we shall be received in the synagogue to-morrow.”

There was a silence, during which Julia Wardell gazed in her grave, handsome face.

“Oh! come, come, my dear! religion’s no subject for joking.”

She remembered some flighty ideas which Laura had picked up out of books, and for which she had been taken to task by the curate at Gray Forest. She had been present at one of their controversial encounters in the drawing-room, and had been lost in the clouds, and was edified by Laura’s audacity

and learning, and thought her capable of anything.

"No, Julia," she said, laughing, "you shall have liberty of conscience. What I really intend is to take you with me to-morrow to a Jewish synagogue in the City, where we shall hear some good music."

"Well, you need not frighten one by talking as if you were out of your wits. I shouldn't object—in fact, I should like it very well," said Julia Wardell.

"You mustn't tell any one—it's a secret expedition, mind," Challys Gray enjoined.

Mrs. Wardell agreed, appending the reflection, "but who *is* there to tell?"

"There's Charles Mannering, and I'm sure he'd find out some excellent reason why we should not go."

"Not if he came with us himself."

"Well, I don't want that either—we're not obliged to tell Charles Mannering everything we do, and I shouldn't like to take him with us."

"Very good, dear; there's no very particular reason why we should, and I suppose

we mustn't talk—any more than we do in church—so I don't see any good in taking him with us."

"And don't ask him to tea," said Laura.

"Why not to tea?" inquired she.

"Because we are to go in the evening. Don't be alarmed, we shall have a gallery to ourselves, and the carriage shall wait close to the door—and I think it is a charming adventure."

So on Friday morning she sent a note to Charles to say—

"We are going out this evening, so don't come"—and having written thus far, she fancied she had meant him to think they were going out to tea—so she resolutely added, "It is not to tea, and I'm not going to tell you more than that we are going to a place of worship, and I hope that way of spending an evening is approved of by your gravity."

Charles did not appear. In due time the carriage was at the door; the ladies got in, and away they drove.

They arrived at their destination a little

late. They should have been there before sunset. It was now twilight, and the street lamps lighted.

When the carriage drew up, Laura looked from the window and saw a large building resembling, she thought with some disappointment, a meeting-house. She saw a large door in the centre, and two smaller doors, one at each side. But no one appeared at the steps to whom they could put a question.

The footman stood at the carriage door for his orders. In her perplexity she saw a female beckon to her from one of the side doors—and was determined.

“Come, Julia—come, dear;” and she got out, followed by Mrs. Wardell, and they found themselves in a small chamber, from which a staircase ascended.

“How did you know, dear, that we wished to come up to the gallery?” asked Laura of the handsome little Jewish girl with raven hair and great dark eyes, and the rich transparent tints of her race.

“The liveries, please, miss, and—and I

was told the colour of your eyes, and that you were very handsome, please."

Laura smiled, and was disposed to like the little girl, and to admire the place. But there was not, as yet, at least, much to admire. It was very much such a vestibule and staircase, lighted by a hanging lamp, as conduct to the gallery of a common-place church, except that they did not communicate by any side door with the great central passage leading on to the floor of the building.

She was, however, already interested, for, faint and muffled, she heard the solemn swell of voices chanting. She could distinguish at times the soaring notes of a falsetto mingling with tenors and basses; and as she softly ascended, those strange and beautiful harmonies, exceeding, she thought, any she had ever heard in cathedral music, grew grander and more thrilling, until, on reaching the back of the gallery, the music was perfectly distinct.

But here she was disappointed — for although she found herself in an assembly of Jewish women (as was clear enough from

the peculiarities of outline and complexion), a close lattice-work covered the front of the gallery, and she feared would effectually interrupt her view of the interior of the building.

The little girl silently indicated two vacant seats in front, to which accordingly they made their way. Here it was easy to see through the lattice, now close to their eyes, all that was passing below.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A RECOGNITION.

Looking beneath and before her she saw a large chamber, the general effect of which resembled that of a church, with, however, a few considerable distinctions.

There was at each side a row of tall windows, which, however, the deepening twilight failed to penetrate, and the lamplight from large hanging candelabra filled the building. Some way up the centre passage, was a railed enclosure containing a table, on a sort of dais, ascended by several steps. At each side of this table stood a man ; one the reader, the other an officer of the synagogue, and behind them at a desk were six others, who were, at the moment, chanting the service, led by the reader. Beyond this, at the far extremity, was something resembling a wardrobe,

covered before with a red velvet curtain embroidered with gold, and with Hebrew letters embroidered on the valance at its top ; and in bas relief an angel, as large as a living human figure, was carved at each side of it. Over this hung a solitary lamp, and at its right extremity stood a figure, very singular. He was dressed in a white satin cassock, that nearly reached the ground ; his shoes were fastened with large silver buckles, and on his head a tall, white conical hat, with a dark roll of fur instead of a brim, surrounding his head.

The curtained piece of furniture was the ark, and the strangely-costumed man was the Rabbi.

The officiating people, as well as the congregation, all males, stood facing the East, their backs toward the gallery, and wearing their hats, and each with a white woollen drapery, with a broad stripe of blue, hanging about his shoulders.

The scene was so odd, almost grotesque, for these white draperies were worn shawl fashion, and had long slender white tassels



from their corners—and the voices were so splendid, the entire service proceeding in the Hebrew language, and the Oriental seclusion of the lattice so new and strange, that Laura was too much interested in the novelty of the spectacle and situation for a minute or two, to recollect the particular object of her visit. Soon, however, it recurred. She fixed her attention on the singers. There were two tenors, one a smaller man than the other. But standing as they all did with their backs to the gallery, she almost despaired of any accident's affording her a glimpse of their faces.

Such a chance, however, did at last occur. The chanting subsided. There was a silence, and the reader called in a few words in a low tone to a person, one of the officers of the synagogue, who proceeded to a distant seat, from which arose a hatted man with his copious white shawl, who proceeded to the ark, drew the curtain, opened a double door, and produced two rolls, which he drew reverently forth from their embroidered velvet cases.

These were the manuscript copies of the law written on vellum. The reading of the law was to begin, and now, too, began the opportunity for which Laura Gray had been waiting.

From one of the openings in the side of the railed enclosure the reader proceeded, followed by the six singers, his assistants, who proceeded singly in slow procession behind him up the building, and as they filed round the corner of the railing she had a glimpse of each in the series of those dark Jewish faces—and one, that of the smaller tenor, who was walking like the rest with downcast eyes startled her. She had but a momentary and very imperfect view of the black-haired pallid face which looked to her like the malignant countenance which she had seen at the window and in the hall of Guildford House! She drew back instinctively—she felt uncertain but frightened. Very much frightened for a few seconds, and then very angry with Mr. Dacre for exposing her to that kind of shock without a warning. Then she began to grow very

restless and uncomfortable, and her first impulse was to make her escape quietly and quickly from the place.

But was she quite certain—was there no mistake? when she looked again these figures stood, like the rest, with their backs turned toward her. The reader was standing a little to the left of the Rabbi, and the singers in a semicircle behind him. The chanting proceeded, and she remained in uncertainty.

Henceforward the vocal music, rich in harmony, finer still in the quality of the voices that mingled in it, had ceased to enchant her. Like sweet and solemn music heard through a terrible dream, it confused her sensations, but her spirit no longer took part in it. She could think of nothing but the chance of again seeing, and with more certain observation, that odious face which she was so nearly certain she recognised.

Now, again, the chanting was suspended. The reader and his choir returned in the same order to their former places, and as

they marched slowly down this face turned fully to the gallery, she did see the face that had looked in at the study window and peered into the hall, and that pale, black-browed man, with the large sullen mouth, and the great lurid eyes, chanting the time-honoured Jewish liturgy, was actually one—perhaps the chief—of those miscreant conspirators who were persecuting her with so satanic a persistency, and had actually attempted to murder Alfred Dacre.

A sense of danger and of horror overpowered her—she felt faint, and whispered in Mrs. Wardell's ear—

“Let us come away, dear.”

“But may we?” answered the chaperon.

“I'll try—I wont stay,” whispered Laura, and rose quickly. No interruption was offered. Their withdrawal seemed hardly observed. How glad she was of that lattice screen that covered the front of the gallery, for the sullen malignant eye of the little tenor had for a moment swept the place from which she was looking down and held her there.

On reaching the street door Alfred Dacre stepped swiftly to her side. He looked in her face and saw how pale she was as he offered her his arm. She was seated in the carriage, she scarcely knew how, and he leaning on the window looking in.

"You are fatigued?" he whispered, taking her hand with an anxious look.

"Nothing," she said, not removing it.

"It was so good of you to come."

"I suspected it was all about my own business, and so it was," she said, looking for a moment darkly into his eyes with a very little nod.

"I understand. You recognised some one?"

"Yes."

"Then my course is clear."

"You are not to take any step without first consulting me," said Challys Gray, with a sudden access of her imperious manner, "Nothing—I'll never speak again to you if you do, Mr. Dacre. Nothing shall be done without my permission."

He smiled, and said—

"May I call to-morrow at Guildford House?"

"Yes, certainly. Who is Mrs Wardell talking to?" she said, glancing at the other window. "Is that Charles Mannering?" she said addressing the speaker at the other side.

"Yes, here I am," said Charles, with a laugh; "you did not expect me. I ran down to Brompton on the chance of your having changed your mind and stayed at home, to beg a cup of tea, and I learned from the servant that you had come to this place, and I was impertinent enough to follow."

Though Charles laughed, she fancied he looked vexed, and was speaking in a tone that was not really so gay as he assumed to be. And though, perhaps, she would not have confessed this to any one, I think it made her uncomfortable.

"Don't go for a moment," she whispered to him; and, resuming her little talk with Mr. Dacre, she said—"I am so nervous while I stay here. I am longing to leave

this place. I was a little vexed with you, for a moment, when I saw that face ; but I dare say it was necessary, at least important, that I should."

"The important and the ridiculous, trick and reality, deceit and enthusiasm, as you may one day learn, Miss Gray, are strangely mixed up at times. It shall be my office to discriminate. I admire your energy. I wish I could tell you all I owe you. You have showed me the game, and I will run it down."

"But you remember, you are not to do anything without my consent," she said.

"Don't be the least uneasy ; there shall be no *fracas*, do you but be half as wise as I believe you."

"Well, I'll try. And, now, I really am growing uncomfortable ; those dreadful people will be coming out ; and I think the horses are growing impatient ; so I'll say good night," and she gave him her hand and continued—"Julia, dear, Mr. Dacre is going, you must bid him good night." And thus, transferring him to Mrs. Wardell, she

herself turned to Charles, and said—"You must come back to tea with us ; you'll come in here and drive home with us."

"Do you really wish it?" said he.

"Wish it? Of course I wish it, or I shouldn't tell you to do it," said the young lady.

"Well, I've got a cab here. I can't take a seat with you, I'm very sorry to say, having a call to make ; but it is only a minute or two at my solicitor's chambers, and I shall be at Guildford House in less than ten minutes after you get there ; and I wont say good bye."

"What a very charming person he is!" exclaimed Julia Wardell, turning towards the speaker.

"Who?" asked Laura.

"Oh ! Mr. Dacre, of course," said Charles. "I don't know of anyone else, at present, answering to the description."

"Well, he's gone and we must go also, so I shall expect you, remember," and away they drove toward home.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE FLEET.

As they drove away Charles saw Mr. Dacre step into a cab, in which he saw, he fancied, some other persons seated. It drove away just as he got into his hansom. He was in no particular good humour with Mr. Dacre; and, at sight of his companions, his suspicions and his curiosity revived.

“Drive after that cab and be sure you keep it in sight,” said he; himself watching it with a shrewd and steady gaze as they pursued.

From time to time as they clattered along the pavement, Mannering told the driver to pull-in a little, so as to regulate the distance between them; and, with this caution, he followed through several streets, and turning into one, deserted and old-fashioned, Dacre’s

cab drew up at the steps of a dingy hall-door. Dacre and one of his companions got out, and, after a very few words his friend ran up the steps, and Dacre jumping into the cab, it drove away at a rapid pace. Charles Mannering had his misgivings about Dacre. What or who was he? That was an odd-looking street—a curious habitation for the intimate of a very fine man as, he fancied, Dacre assumed to be.

Some qualms visited him as he pursued the chase. Was this sort of thing within the limits which circumscribe a gentleman's morality?

"Yes;" he insisted bullying himself—"it is not merely allowable, but my duty. I will find out who this Mr. Dacre is. I'll learn, at all events, what are his haunts, and who his friends. It is worse than ridiculous the confidence with which Challys treats him; that the poor little thing should be made such a fool of; and certainly, I'll not spare myself, nor spare him either, and—where are we getting to now?"

By this time they were approaching a

famous place. That grand *chemin de fer*, the road to ruin, had then, as we know, like other great highways, that daily and nightly pour into a common centre their inexhaustible streams of life—its handsome and convenient terminus, I mean the Fleet Prison; and, at the entrance of this Mr. Dacre's cab drew up, and he and his remaining companion jumped down to the flags—beside a lamp-post, which then stood close to the door.

With Dacre there entered at this door his companion, a fat, round-shouldered Jew, some sixty years of age, with the characteristic heavy nose; a great moist smiling mouth, and eyes half closed; his hands in his pockets, and his wrinkled and somewhat dusty black velvet waistcoat crossed and lapped with several gold chains.

"How ish Mr. Blunt this hevening?" he inquired politely of Mr. Blunt, the officer at the hatch, a low door, well barred and bolted, which communicated with the interior passage, a view of which it permitted breast high.

"Well, thank you, sir. Can I do anything for you, Mr. Goldshed?" said this gentleman, touching his hat as he lowered his newspaper.

"We want to pay a vishit, me and my friend, to Mr. de Beaumirail, if he'sh at home," drawled the Jew, facetiously.

"Well," said Mr. Blunt unbending, in the same pleasant vein, and opening the enchanted gate to let these privileged spirits pass in; "it's only to knock at his hall-door, sir, and ask the footman." In the passage lounging about the hatch were several nondescript persons, who might be bailiffs or wardens, a reserve force in case of any one's being disposed to be troublesome.

"Any more detainers against Foljambe?" drawled the Jew in Mr. Blunt's ear, as he passed.

"Just a little thing o' fifteen pun, sir."

"Nothing else, you're sure?" said Mr. Goldshed, stopping short.

"Not a penny, sir."

Mr. Goldshed whistled some bars of a quiet tune, which was interrupted by a

little hiccough, as he shook off his momentary meditation, and swayed and swaggered after his companion.

Charles Mannering jumped down to the flag-way, hesitated, and got in again, and then made up his mind, got out once more, told the man to wait where he was, and walked on to the door which Dacre had entered only a minute before.

Our friend, Charles Mannering, felt as a proud man does who has detected himself doing a shabby thing. His pride upbraided him, and he was inwardly ashamed. He could not acknowledge it though, and he was determined to brazen it out.

The fact is, he was jealous of this handsome Alfred Dacre, and jealousy is a madness, subject, as we know, to capricious and violent paroxysms. He had seen Dacre talking at the window of the carriage to Challys Gray, and conclusions had instantly possessed his mind. Dacre had, of course, arranged this visit to the synagogue, had accompanied them, and had in fact as much of their society as he pleased ;

while he had been not only uninvited to be of the expedition, but written to and forbidden to go to Guildford House; but he would have been in the way.

And who was this Mr. Dacre whom Challys Gray had taken up in so unaccountable a way, and appointed to be her standing counsel, and her knight errant, her prime minister, and even her master of the revels?

He, Charles Mannering, would find out all about him. He had no idea of mere masks and disguises, *mimæ*, *balatrones*, winning their way by sheer impudence and insinuation, with their disguises still on, into such houses as Challys Gray's. He was huffed and wounded, and in no mood to mince matters with Mr. Dacre. The sooner, in his present temper, he thought, they went to the heart of the question, and understood one another, the better. And he was quite sure if Ardenbroke were here, he would thoroughly approve the resolution he had taken.

He stepped in, expecting to see Dacre,

but he had gone in as we have seen, and Charles walked up to Mr. Blunt, and he said—not knowing well what question to put—

“The gentleman who came in here this minute, can you tell me where he is?”

“Mr. Goldshed?”

“No, Mr. Dacre; two gentlemen came in here together?”

“Oh! yes, I know *him*—gone in to see Mr. de Beaumirail—well, sir?”

Well, what was to be his next step? He had cooled by this time.

“Do you want him, sir?”

“Well, as he’s gone in to see a friend, you say, it will answer me another time. I’ll—yes—I shall see him elsewhere, to-morrow, or—that will do. Will you allow me to light my cigar?”

And with this disjointed address, and his cigar glowing, he turned his back upon Mr. Blunt, and full of conjecture, as to what Mr. Dacre could possibly want of De Beaumirail, whom he professed to detest, he returned to his cab.

“Not too late to follow them to Brompton,” he thought, as he looked at his watch under the lamp.

After all this devious excursion had been accomplished at such a pace that less time than one would have supposed had been wasted upon it. So away he went, having bribed the cabman with a handsome promise, through the still bustling town to the then comparatively rural and sequestered suburb of Old Brompton.



## CHAPTER IX.

### A WORD IN HASTE.

"OH, Charlie, you're a good creature, after all," said Challys Gray. "I'm so glad you have come."

So gay and kindly was her voice, that half his jealousy and all his gloom vanished as he spoke.

"Glad—really glad—well! I'm rewarded. Did you like the singing—was it worth so long a drive, and so unprotected a—what shall I call it?"

"A frolic," said Challys Gray—"quite worth it; and I advise you to look in and listen, and Julia Wardell will lend you her white Cashmere shawl, and you'll not have the trouble even of taking off your hat. But what do you mean by unprotected? I'll tell you—you mean a question. You

men are always accusing us poor women of practising small duplicities and indirections, and, alas, what an example do you set us? For instance, by introducing that one little word, you contrive to ask me, without seeming to do so—did you and Julia Wardell go by yourselves?”

He laughed.

“It is so well reasoned, I can’t find it in my heart to deny it.”

“Well, I’ll meet that confession by telling you as frankly, we did go by ourselves, and witnessed the whole thing without a protector—not among the gentlemen in shawls, but among the ladies in great coats.”

He fancied that she said all this to acquit herself of having been accompanied by Mr. Dacre. There was something unspeakably gratifying in this. Charles’s spirit effervesced.

“Yes, indeed,” said Mrs. Wardell, lowering her book of fashions—in which she had been studying a lady in gigot sleeves, smiling over her left shoulder, with pink gloves on, and a lilac pelisse—“all we ladies were shut up together in the gallery, with a

little grille before us, so that no one could see us from the lower part of the chamber, or whatever it is, and very comfortably we saw and heard it all. I was rather amused—I mean, of course, it's wrong to say exactly that of a place of—of—is it exactly worship—now that the Jews, you know, are under a curse?"

"We did not act on that though. We sat there as discreetly as the most orthodox Jewess; and very delightful, really, the singing was."

"I saw Dacre there," said Charles, who by a glance had ascertained that Mrs. Wardell was deep in her fashions again.

"Yes," said Laura, a little dryly.

"Had he anything to tell worth hearing?"

"No; nothing yet but good hopes."

"In what direction do his hopes point?" said Charles.

"He expects a discovery very soon."

"I think I have made a little discovery myself in the meantime," said Charles.

"About whom?" she asked, raising her eyes suddenly.

"About Mr. Dacre," he said, with a faint smile, returning her gaze as steadily.

"Oh," said Laura, also with a smile, growing a little pale, and then suddenly blushing and looking away.

She looked back again at him a little fiercely, quite straight. He was still smiling, but his face was sad and pale.

"Now, Charlie, here we are, a pair of fools," she said, with a gay laugh. "You look at me as if you suspected me of high treason, or worse, if worse can be; and I, like an idiot as I am, blush, as usual, without a reason. Was ever so provoking a trick? I always do it. It is quite enough if I particularly wish not to blush. I am always sure to blush at the wrong moment. One day when we were all together in the drawing-room at Gray Forest, and dear papa reading his newspaper by the window, in came old Medlicot, the housekeeper, in consternation, to report that one of three West Indian fruits—they were like ripe figs—I remember them very well, and a great curiosity, to have been pronounced

upon that day after dinner by the collective wisdom—one of them was missing. Dear papa laid down his paper; you were talking to my poor sister, and you were silent. She looked up from her drawing at old Medlicot; and I, what did I do?—I blushed, neck, forehead, all scarlet. I held up my head as long as I could; but I felt the brand of guilt glowing on my cheeks. My eyes dropped to the carpet, and, in an agony of conscious innocence, I burst into tears. My father told old Medlicot it did not matter. I know he thought I had taken it, and was sparing my feelings. I think you all thought I had eaten it—and there never was a time when I could have done so mean a thing—or hid it, if I had, but I didn't; and dear Maud understood me when I told her, and laughed and kissed me, and pitied me ever so much. Poor Maud, she understood me, and always judged me charitably, through all my furies and follies, and made much of the little good that was in me, and made the best of all the bad."

As she spoke, Challys Gray got up and

went to the window, which was open, and looked out.

A very different scene it was from the lordly timber, the broad river, and high wooded banks which one saw from the great window of Gray Forest. Very different, too, from the still, sultry sea, under the brilliant moon of Naples, with which, for two winters, her eye had grown familiar. Still there was something she liked—something even of poetry, in the dim night view of the tufted trees, and homely and irregular buildings.

“I’ll bid you good-night, I believe,” said Julia Wardell, waking gently, and putting her worsteds into her work-basket. “Would you mind touching the bell, Charles? Thanks;” and, giving her dog in charge of the servant, he conveyed the brute upstairs, where, at Mrs. Wardell’s door, her maid received the dog and his mistress.

A *tête-à-tête* with Charlie Mannering was nothing—very like uncle and niece, brother and sister—what less romantic?

“Yes, Challys,” he said, when he had

closed the door after Julia Wardell, "one other person does understand you perfectly. You are a very odd person, very inconvenient, very like an angel—for I do believe nothing on earth would tempt you to tell a fib. No, from the time you were a tiny little thing, no higher than that, when I was a great clumsy fellow of seventeen, and you a little girl of nine—always quite true. How did it happen? I wonder whether anyone else ever so walked in the light as you, Challys?"

"Come, Charlie, this is quite new. I hardly know you. I expected a lecture instead—wholesome bitters, and here is a shower of bonbons."

"Well, I used, I believe, to lecture you a great deal more than I had any business to do, but I don't think I have ventured for a long time; that conceited custom has fallen into disuse, hasn't it?"

"Too long, Charlie, I like old customs, and I think it would do me good."

"Really, Challys?"

"Really, for at the worst, I should laugh

at it, and laughter is about the pleasantest exercise we have. But what is your discovery, pray, about Mr. Dacre? for since I have employed him in this odd business, I should like to know."

"He told you, didn't he, that he did not know De Beaumirail, and I've discovered that he does know him, and visits him frequently in the debtors' prison."

"No, on the contrary, he said very distinctly he did know him: he never said anything else; but he did say that he didn't like him."

"Oh!" said Charles Mannering, in a disappointed tone, "I'm very glad! Then my discovery amounts to nothing, but I suppose he'll have something to say about his interview?"

"I don't think you like him much, Charlie."

"Why?"

"Because you can't afford him a good word."

"I know next to nothing about him," answered Charles, "and the little I do



know, I confess I don't like. People have a 'good deal to say of him that is not quite pleasant. I have heard some odd things. I'm not quite certain, that is, I don't quite rely upon them yet, but I'll make out, and you shall hear."

"I don't expect any marvels, Charlie, at least about him. By the time Ardenbroke comes back all reasons for secrecy will have disappeared, and we shall hear all about him. In the meantime it doesn't matter. I'm much more anxious to learn something about those people—shut the window, I grow nervous whenever I think of them—the people who have been writing those letters, and I did not thank you half enough for all the trouble you have been taking."

"I only wish, Challys, I could deserve your thanks in any way."

"Yes, indeed, Charlie, I am very much obliged; and suppose we talk of Gray Forest again, and old times. I think they were very happy times. I shall never be so happy again."

"Yes, you may—you will—happier than

ever. It is I who have reason to despond—to despair.”

“Indeed!” laughed Challys. “Why, what’s the matter?”

“No, thanks, I shan’t tell my story—you’d be sure to laugh at it; you’ve begun already.”

“I told you before, I should like that extremely.”

“Yes; but I shouldn’t—no, I could not bear that.”

Challys looked wonderingly at him for a moment. For that moment she was a little puzzled.

“Is he going,” she thought, “to make me his confidante?”

“I could tell you a great deal, Challys, but it is better not—you’d think me a fool; and as you say you like laughing, you’d be sure to laugh at me.”

She looked at him again. He was not more embarrassed, she thought, than a shy man might be, who was on the point of disclosing to a third person the secret of a romance.

"Surely, Charles, you are not going to have such a secret and hide it from me?"

It was Charles's turn now to glance at his companion's face—beautiful, kind; was it more than kind? Grave. What was he to make of that look? But might not there be a great deal—everything in that invitation—so appealing and quite irresistible. And if her looks betrayed no more—was she not a girl, and what spirit so cautious?

"Well, Challys, I have a story to tell."

She listened only. How beautiful she looked, as she leaned on the side of the window, listening! He could have kissed the clumsy old window-frame for her sake.

"May I tell it?"

"I'm waiting to hear, Charles."

"Well, Challys, perhaps, you have guessed it. I've tried to hide it even from myself, but it would not do—I can't. I tell you Challys, I have loved you without knowing it for years; I know it now, perhaps, too late. I adore you; if you can ever like me, darling—*ever*—don't answer now—ever so

little; let me hope and wait, for years—any time you please, only don't decide in a moment against me. If you *could ever*—any time—ever so long—and if not—you'll laugh at me, Challys, for an hour, and then forget me for ever."

"Forget you!" She looked very angry; there was a brilliant flush in her cheeks. "Never, while a sense of the ridiculous remains to me. We shall never shake hands again."

There was silence for some seconds, and his ear tingled with these words.

"It is very hard I can't have a friend!" exclaimed Challys Gray vehemently. "Is there no such relation on earth as a friend and a kinsman? Why will you form your ideas of us girls from bad plays, and even farces? Nothing but lovers! You can't have meant that folly. You shall forget it, Charlie, and so will I, and I'll forgive you."

There was another silence. Charles was pushing the window as if he meant to raise it, he did not know why, but he turned to Challys, and looked at her—

"I think you might have spoken a little more kindly," said he at last, with the gentleness of utter disappointment.

"And if I had, you'd have thought I did not mean what I say, and it would have gone for nothing."

"I think you may be quite distinct, Challys, and yet kind."

"No, the unkindness is in *being* distinct, and if I were less distinct you would not have understood me. Now come, old Charlie, you usen't to be so foolish, and you must give up all this to please me. If I did not like you very much, in the way I choose, I should not ask you. Yes, you must, now and here, make a solemn vow—you must swear an unalterable indifference, and let us be a pair of steadfast friends, for I do like you, and I should hate to lose you, and I will give you my hand again. *There*, kind old Charlie, you have made me sorry." And she hastily shook him by the hand, and ran away.

He was stung, he was mortified, he was grieved; his heart was very full, for he liked her still, better than ever, I think.

He continued looking at the door for some time, as if he could see her still in the air, and then he turned and leaned on the window-sash, looking out on the starlight, and the blurred and silent landscape, and he wept in silence some very bitter tears.

## CHAPTER X.

### NEW PLANS.

Now, here was an heiress; and what was Charles Mannering, that he should aspire to her hand? There was nothing very monstrous in it, however, even in temporal matters, for Charles Mannering had some very good certainties, and much better possibilities; and, I must do him the justice to say, that he would have acted precisely as he did, if she had not fifty pounds to her dowry.

To a man such as he, with a somewhat rough exterior, yet sensitive, simple, and, in some respects, very reserved, the fear of vulgar misapprehension renders such advantages as those enjoyed by Miss Laura Challys Gray a real impediment in the way of free avowal in such romantic situations.

It was a long walk to his lodgings that night, for it was too late to find a cab, and in truth he preferred the walk to reaching home more easily and swiftly.

Until this Mr. Dacre had appeared, he had not suspected the actual state of his heart. Then the alarm of jealousy rang out. Then the danger of losing her was real. But the crisis of this evening had stolen upon him, and a great revolution befallen him unawares.

Now that he had got home to his lodgings, what was there for him to think about? Still one problem of intense interest. If he could be sure that she did not care for Alfred Dacre, the light of hope would spring up again.

After all, was it not natural, owing to very special circumstances, that Dacre should be employed, and, being employed, that he should be admitted to confer confidentially in this odd and unpleasant affair; and except in these circumstances, which might just as well exist if Dacre were an old fellow of five-and-fifty, was there anything to alarm, much less to sink him in de-



spair? No, he must not be too much cast down.

But how would Challys receive him? On second thoughts, would she banish him? In the morning he had resumed that catechism of a hundred questions, with which in like circumstances an ingenious man can always torment himself.

A very welcome light came—a little lamp in the shape of a note, in the hand of Challys Gray, lay on his table in the morning. It said—

“You are to come to us to tea, Charlie. I shall have ever so many things to consult you about. I intend to set you down to study maps and handbooks, and make a comprehensive plan of travel for us, for I begin to grow tired of Guildford House; and for this and other reasons I think—but sage as you are, you must not vaunt your superior prescience—I think, I say, sir, I shall lead a wandering life, for a time, and peep at all places worth looking at. And now I must tell you *my* part of the plan. Your business in London is a make-belief—

you don't want it, and it doesn't want you; you shall take your leave of that sham, and enlarge your mind, and improve your tastes, like us, by seeing the world; every nunnery admits a lay-brother, a porter, or something, and our sisterhood (you remember I am a nun of that strict order who lead apes in the Elysian fields) can't travel so conveniently alone; so you really must make up your mind, old Charlie, and help to take care of us. I should not half enjoy it if you were not of the party. Julia Wardell and an inflexible old maid may not be the most interesting companions in the world; but we are cheerful, and quite free from that dismal ingredient of human nature called romance. So once for all, Charlie, come you must. Do come, or I shan't believe that you forgive as easily as I forget, and I shall write a great deal more formally in future."

Now here were two very consolatory sheets of note-paper, for not only did they restore him quite to his old place, but they seemed to say very clearly that Challys Gray, although she would brook no love-making,

was yet fancy-free, and quite as resolute a spinster as ever. The sense of relief was immense. He could almost have found it in his heart, at the moment, to forgive Dacre.

So the edifice overthrown but the night before, rose up again from the rubbish of its ruin at that pleasant spell. Happy compensation, that the hopes of lovers are as easily excited as their fears!

Notwithstanding what had passed, it was therefore with a lighter heart than he had carried for some time before, that he walked up the double line of old trees to the hall-door of Guildford House.

A little sad as he drew near, but relieved at least of one terrible uncertainty—a little nervous about meeting Challys, but still happy that the way was not closed against him—he heard on a sudden a pleasant voice in the air calling—

“Welcome, welcome!”

“Thanks, Challys, a thousand thanks!” said he, looking up to the flowers and the pretty face in the drawing-room window.

"We are busy over the map of Europe, and at Murray's Hand-books. Come up and help us."

No one could have told by Charles's looks or manner that his heart was beating so fast, and that he hardly knew for a minute or two what he was saying; neither would a shrewder observer than Julia Wardell have suspected from Challys Gray's greeting that so decisive and odd an interview had occurred so lately.

"I was thinking of Italy," said Miss Gray, pointing with a laugh to the open atlas, and the litter of handbooks about it. "But I have just read a few such awful words of Mr. Murray's, about mosquitos, and the summer sun, that I shall certainly take Italy rather late; and I find myself so tired of geography, and so very ignorant of latitudes and longitudes, that I must ask you to help us at our next lesson; and you know we have time enough to decide in, for Mr. Gryston says there are things for me to sign before I go, that wont be ready till the end of June."

"Oh! I fancied you were going more suddenly."

"What a pity we can't!" Julia Wardell threw in; "and I don't think the hot weather, if it weren't for the flies, would matter at all. I like warm weather; I've known people say they could not sleep in hot weather, but I never found it disagree with me."

"Well, Julia dear, we'll consult again to-morrow, and Charles shall look in and help us—wont you?—and we'll settle something; but I think we have puzzled over maps so long this evening, that I should like to see that great book shut up and not opened for a week again. Do, pray, shut it, Charles."

And as she spoke she went to the window, and sat down on the stool there, looking out; and Charles joined her—the window at which only last night they had stood in that strange colloquy; and the page on which that dialogue was inscribed Challys had taken out of the record of their lives—and that history was going on, just as if that passage had never been written.

"What was that you mentioned yesterday about Mr. Dacre's going to see that wretched man, De Beaumirail?" asked Miss Gray, after a moment's silence.

Charles recounted the circumstance.

"I suppose he speaks ill of me to every one," said Challys Gray, after a brief silence; "I can't help it. I wish to Heaven some one less superstitious, or nervous, or whatever it is, had the responsibility of his fate cast upon them. I can't get over my horror of interposing to disturb. I don't argue it; it is not a matter of reason, I've told you, but one of instinct—superstition overpowering conviction. I can't change myself—nothing can alter me; and all the time he is describing me in such colours; and it does seem so cruel and I *can't* help it."

"If Mr. Dacre allows him to speak ill of you in his presence, I don't think it matters one farthing what he thinks of anybody," said Charles.

"I had another teasing note this morning from that poor old clergyman, Mr.

Parker ; he's so good, and so foolish. So far from sympathising, he can't even understand what I mean."

Charles Mannering smiled, but he forbore the old dispute.

"Another reason why I don't care to go immediately," she said, suddenly recurring to a former part of their conversation, "is that I don't choose those people, whoever they are, who want to frighten me, to fancy that they have driven me away. Everything, I expect, will be quiet in a very little time ; the people who gave me all that annoyance will be found out, and stand disarmed and at my mercy. Then I shall go. But they shan't bully me ; and here comes tea. Shall I give you some?"

## CHAPTER XI.

### DE BEAUMIRAIL.

“WHAT kind of tea do you think this is?” asked Miss Gray of her guest.

Charles raised his cup to his lips.

While they are sipping their early tea, and talking with the volatility of youth, by this time, on quite other subjects, the reader of these pages is reminded, by the little dialogue at the close of the last chapter, that he has not visited De Beaumirail since his despairing and bitter conference with the worthy old clergyman.

How, meanwhile, did it fare with the prisoner? He was not better—worse. He lay on his bed. He had sent for his friend, perhaps his only friend, Mr. Parker.

He entered the dismal bed-room of the prodigal; very tired he seemed at the end



of his breathless journey down the road to ruin. He lay in that ample dressing-gown which his few visitors knew so well. His arm was on the pillow; his forehead pillowed on his arm.

When the old clergyman stepped to the bedside, there lay Monsieur de Beaumirail, prone and motionless, his face buried in his arm, little to be seen of him but his long locks lying over that arm, those long folds of shawl drapery, and, lower down, one foot slipped, the other from which the slipper had fallen.

Have you seen tired or drunken men lie so unstrung and still that they seem to have sunk into the surface that sustains them? Here was a fellow, neither drunk nor yet tired, Heaven knows, by physical exercise, but pressed down by a load immeasurable, who lay like a dead man, sunk down together and into himself, but not by the hand of death—perhaps by a heavier sorrow.

“Mr. de Beaumirail,” murmured the clergyman, placing just his finger-tips ti-

midly on the coverlet. "Mr. de Beaumirail—pray, sir, are you worse?"

"No, sir. I don't know—I don't care."

"Has your doctor been with you, sir?"

"I—upon my honour, I forget. Does it matter to anyone?"

"I thought you might not have been so well. I fancied he might not have been as well satisfied."

"Visitation of the sick—I know—thank you—nothing of the kind," said the prisoner gruffly.

"Would there be any use in my again calling upon Miss Gray? I ventured to write a line to her this morning."

"I'm sorry you did. None in the world. It has come to this, that even were you to succeed with her now, it could not do me the slightest good," said he. "The wand, one touch of which, in her hand, would have transformed the reptile you see here into a free man, has passed from her cruel fingers into a stronger grasp, and is broken; that

chance is gone, and I am a very slave. I'm talking allegories."

"Well, sir?" said the clergyman.

"And very hackneyed ones," said De Beaumirail. "It is well to masquerade our degradations in any sort of disguise."

"But what, pray, has happened, sir, in plain terms?" asked the old man.

"I have fallen into the hands of villains."

"Villains! Very strong language. I hope *not*, sir," said Mr. Parker dissuasively.

"Here I lie, sir, with the fangs of one—two—three—four wolves holding me fast."

"Well, now, your interpretation?"

"A gang of sharpers—a gang of sharpers!" cried De Beaumirail.

"What have they done?"

"They have bought up all my debts, except hers. A bargain, sir, I suspect—don't you? I don't think you'd back me to pay a shilling in the pound. Eh?"

"I never make wagers, sir," said the old clergyman.

"So much the better, unless you have the talent of making a book."

"I don't quite follow you, sir."

"Well, Mr. Parker, they have bought up all the debts, except Miss Gray's. There's an attorney, there's a Scotchman——"

"Some of my best friends—some of the best people on earth—are Scotchmen, sir," expostulated the clergyman with some ardour, and a little indignation.

"Yes, very good fellows among them, no doubt; but they're a d——d sensible people, sir; their heads are a great deal harder and longer than yours or mine, and I pay a compliment to the nationality when I say I'd rather deal with any rogue than a Scotch one. Yes, there's an attorney, and a Scotchman, and two Jews, sir. You see what a vice I have got into; and if Miss Laura Challys Gray, whose cruelty has brought me to this pass, wished ever so much now to undo the crime against all human feeling she has committed—she no longer could; so bend the knee no more at her shrine—that divinity is deposed. And

what news of Alfred Dacre?—have you heard anything of him lately?—is he still in London?—curse him! I beg your pardon—I'll say bless him, if that will do."

"I don't know—I'm not aware—I'm not in the way of hearing," he replied.

"Then you haven't been to see Miss Gray; for I'm told he's in her house like a tame cat. She has got me into a bad fix, and herself into worse," he laughed.

"No, I've not heard of him since," replied the clergyman.

"Well, last night, one of those wretches who haunt me, brought me his card. You'll see it on the chimney-piece. I would not see him; and since I've been thinking that possibly he was not here at all. I'm encircled by a hell of deception."

"I can throw no light upon it."

"I should like to know one thing," resumed De Beaumirail, sitting up—"what motive he can possibly have for pursuing a poor devil like me as he does. You did not mention my rash language about Miss

Gray, and my resolution to punish her, to any one?"

"I regarded that, sir, exactly as you described it—as so many mad and reckless words. I knew very well that reflection would come to your aid, and that you could not mean it."

De Beaumirail looked down with a musing smile on his ring, and, still smiling, his angry eyes looked suddenly in the old man's face, and said he—

"I *did* mean every word I said, and I did not speak without having measured my strength and my weakness. Challys Gray shall suffer the most exemplary punishment that ever befel a vindictive woman; and if she employs Mr. Dacre any longer as a detective, he shall be suddenly relieved of his office, and she frightened half out of her wits; and you have my permission to tell her what I say."

"You threaten that young lady in cold blood!" exclaimed the old man, in indignant horror.

"Threaten her! Oh, fie! My worthy

friend, be charitable. I don't threaten. Observe the distinction—the miscreant De Beaumirail threatens, say you. The prophet De Beaumirail predicts, say I."

But we must return from our excursion to Guildford House, and the little party whom we left there over their tea-cups.

"Well," answered Charles Mannering, setting down his cup. "It is not gunpowder, is it?"

You observe that Charles has just answered the question with which this chapter opened, so that the little episode involved really no interruption, not even of a second.

## CHAPTER XII.

### SONGS.

GRADUALLY twilight came and moonlight, and the lamp at which Mrs. Wardell worked, and it was night.

Quite friendly, quite in the old vein, and to all outward seeming, quite unembarrassed, was the conversation, and on it flowed—not very profound, but careless, gay, and various.

Charles sat in that statuesque pose, which we may describe as riding upon his chair, with his elbows on the back of it, recounting one of those comic school adventures which are remembered with such a sense of their fun, at a much longer distance. He was looking at pretty Challys Gray, who sat listening and amused by the window as his recital proceeded in low tones.

His back was turned toward the door, so



that he could not see, why on a sudden, Challys blushed so deeply, and looked so prettily embarrassed.

He looked round, and saw Mr. Dacre smiling in the doorway.

"I'm very audacious," laughed Dacre. "I know I should have waited for an invitation; but having an hour I could not resist, so I ventured, and I hope I'm forgiven."

"We are always very happy to see you, Mr. Dacre," interposed Mrs. Wardell. "It is very good of you, knowing how very lonely we are here."

"The odious puppy!" thought Charles, "with his airs of acceptance, and affectation of modesty!"

"Mr. Mannering, our cousin," she said, introducing that gentleman. The dignity of his rising was embarrassed a good deal by his attitude, but Mr. Dacre went upon his former introduction, and smiled, and spoke a word or two, as to an acquaintance.

"How encouraging!" thought Charles. "It is really too good; I'm the stranger—

he's quite at home. I suppose he does the honours here, and lectures the servants."

Charles was resolved, however, that he should not lead the conversation, so he instantly began—

"By-the-bye, I met that woman you both like so much, Mrs. Mauley," said Charles Mannering, with a playful irony.

"Oh! Really!" moaned Laura.

"Dear me, how horrid!" exclaimed Mrs. Wardell, more energetically.

"And I think she meditates a visit. She said she heard you were in town, and asked me where you were," continued Charles.

"You did not tell her, I hope?" said Julia Wardell, looking straight in his face, with round eyes of horror.

"I shall leave London at once," said Laura.

"But did you tell her?" demanded the elder lady.

"Well, you know she asked me quite straight if I knew where you were," said Charles.

"And you told her?" said Mrs. Wardell.

"Challys, you know, would be angry if I told an untruth," said he.

"Then you did tell her?" said the old lady.

"What *did* you say, Charles?" implored Laura.

"Well, Challys, I'll relieve you, I lied; I said I did not know."

"There's no harm on earth in a polite fib now and then when one can't help it," said good Mrs. Wardell.

"I don't like it, though; I feel very small after I have told one," said he.

"I don't in the least," said Mrs. Wardell. "What do you say, Mr. Dacre?"

"I? Oh, of course, I'm for simplicity—whatever is most convenient. If truth answers best, tell truth; if otherwise, fib. In nine cases out of ten, the fib is the more convenient. Human nature is too irascible, life is too short, for veracity. Why should I follow the phantom truth into quags and briars, with the straight path of mendacity before me? Wounded self-love never forgives; by all means let us spare it. For

my part I lie quite frankly, whenever my duty to others or myself invites."

The young man laughed, and his eye glanced on Laura. There was in her look a pained hesitation, as if she doubted whether he was in jest or earnest; but she said nothing. She took up a book that lay on the table, and leaned back as if engrossed by it.

"I don't agree with you at all," said Charles Mannering. "Everyone, I suppose, tells an untruth now and then; but I hate it. I'm not a bit better than other fellows, but that's not my talent or taste. No, I don't agree with you."

"On that point?" asked Dacre.

"Yes," said Charles; "I don't."

"I think you'll find you do."

"Well, I hope I know myself, at least on that point."

"And now, Miss Gray, I'm going to acquit myself," said Dacre. "I not only agree with Mr. Mannering, but I go further. What I just now said is simply farce. I have suffered as much as any one from

falsehood—too much not to hate it; no one on earth is more strict about truth than I. It is the solid foundation of all character, without it the most attractive is but sentiment, impulse, and illusion; it may be beautiful, but as baseless as the rainbow. Nothing so beautiful as truth.”

Challys Gray felt that his glowing eyes were fixed on her, and she said—

“Well, we are all pretty well agreed, except Julia. You’re the only sinner of the party.”

“Oh! don’t say that,” said Dacre. “I’m bad enough; I only venture to give myself a character for truth, and when I give up that, I give myself up; at the same time, I’m profoundly mysterious.”

“Now, Charles, it’s your turn to give an account of yourself,” said Mrs. Wardell.

“Thanks! If I had studied myself carefully enough, and, if I had a proper sense of my importance, perhaps I might expect you to listen; but I really can’t talk of myself, where I’m not quite sure of admiration, and I almost fancy there are other people who interest me more.”

Dacre laughed good-humouredly.

"Modesty is one of the noble attributes ; but what is a fellow to do who was born conceited—and that is my hard case ? I'm not so bad as I was, though ; one learns what one is, as years increase, and I hope I may yet come to be half as modest as I ought to have been at my best."

"I think you're quite modest enough, Mr. Dacre. I never could see the good of having too low an opinion of one's self."

"You are too good-natured, Mrs. Wardell—too indulgent ; but as I get on, I'm not so much my hero—I'm less in love with my follies ; one tires of sugar—one tires even of the looking-glass ; there are other things besides what is termed pleasure—other people besides one's self. Will you, Miss Gray, do me a great kindness ?" he said, suddenly transferring himself to her side, and lowering his voice as he reached it. "Would you mind playing that charming thing of Beethoven's ?"

"Don't ask me this evening—I feel that it would make me so sad. And—and have

you heard anything more?" So said Miss Gray, looking inquiringly into his eyes for a moment. Charles was almost unconsciously watching them with a covert side glance, and he saw still on her cheek the tinge of that blush.

He turned away, stung and alarmed; his pride and jealousy were awake again, and he entered on a little careless conversation with Mrs. Wardell on a new book upon the treatment, education, and dietetics of lap-dogs, which interested that good lady so earnestly that she set down her crochet and discussed the whole matter with a mind greedy of knowledge, if also a little dogmatic.

"I expected to ascertain something last night," said Dacre. "I went, after I had the pleasure of seeing you, to the prison, for the purpose of seeing De Beaumirail, but he would not admit me. I pressed it all I could, but a perverse demon had got possession of him, and he resolutely refused to see me. I'm quite certain he will, though. I brought an influence with me; but next time I shall bring one still more powerful.

Rely upon me. I never yet took a thing up that I did not carry through ; so don't lose faith in me, because my discovery has been postponed from day to day."

Here was a little pause, and he said—

"So you wont play that Beethoven to-night?"

"I can't; but you admitted you could sing, and for us you never have sung," said Miss Gray.

"If you say I must sing, I will."

"That's very good of you."

"No, not a bit," he said in a lower tone, "for I can't help obeying you; it is so delightful to be commanded by Miss Gray."

"That's very pretty, at all events; and now I shall test your sincerity. What do you sing? Do you know the tenors of any of the Italian operas?"

"Some."

"'Don Pasquale?'"

"Yes."

"Well, then, the serenade, 'Comè gentil.' Julia, Mr. Dacre is going to sing a song for us."



“Oh! that’s very good of you, Mr. Dacre.”

Challys Gray played the accompaniment, and Dacre sang; yes, Alfred Dacre sang, so exquisitely, with a voice so ringing and plaintive, that one might have fancied the great tenor of those days in the room.

Dacre was surely a great musician; but we all know it is one thing to fill a drawing-room, and quite another to fill Her Majesty’s theatre. Perhaps this chamber-tenor was better here than the great tenor would have been. Other things he sang, making no difficulty, pleased at the delight and wonder of at least some of his little audience. Then there were songs in which Challys, not knowing them, gave up the piano to him, and listened in a rapture; and then he said—

“Do you know, Miss Gray, I long ago took the subject of that piece of Beethoven’s, and made a song of it.”

He touched the accompaniment lightly, hummed the air for a moment, and then sang. The words were odd, mysterious,

melancholy. Sitting by the window, leaning on her hand, looking out, Laura listened in a rapture that was almost agony, and the fountains of her heart were opened, and tears flowed down her cheeks.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Dacre; it is quite a gift. What a resource you must find your music. It is a most charming talent," said Mrs. Wardell. "Isn't it?" she appealed to Charles.

"My praise is very little worth," said he; "I'm no musician. But," he added, for this sounded rather grudgingly, "I can venture to say what gives me pleasure, and I have seldom listened to music with more."

"I shall be more conceited than ever," said Dacre, giving Charles a smile.

That young gentleman's quick glance searched the smile in vain for a latent mockery. Nothing like an irony was there. It was good-humoured, and seemed to say—

"I understand your feeling; but why should we quarrel? I'm disposed to like you."

The person whom Dacre most wished to please sat still at the window, looking out,

and said nothing. He looked towards her, and then back again at Mrs. Wardell.

"You have inspired us all with romance and sentiment by that delicious music. There's Laura looking out at the moonlight, and I have tangled my worsteds."

"That, certainly, is most gratifying evidence. I wish my poor music could move me ever so little."

"Why, it must. You could not sing with so much feeling if it didn't," said Julia Wardell.

"I don't know. Nothing moves me much now—not even dinner, or money."

"Money!" exclaimed Mrs. Wardell.

"Yes, of course. Riches represent everything we respect on earth," said Mr. Dacre.

"Not everything, I hope, Mr. Dacre," said the old lady, gravely.

"You're quite right—except rank, and, as I said, dinner."

"Oh! fie, Mr. Dacre; you're really too bad."

"As a rule, men have but one determined principle, which is their interest," he con-

tinued; "their passions may cross and perplex it, but it is there. If we affect to despise money, we must change our manners."

"Oh! you're a—what is it?—a cynic, Mr. Dacre. It's quite shocking to hear such sentiments from anyone who can sing like you!" exclaimed Mrs. Wardell.

Dacre laughed. He went over to the window and said very low—

"My hour has flown—come like shadows, so depart—and I return to darkness. May I come again, Miss Gray?"

"Do—yes—we shall be so glad to see you; thank you so much for singing—so very much."

He held her hand ever so little longer than usual, pressed it a little more, and without another word he returned, and took his leave of Mrs. Wardell.

To Charles he held out his hand with the same kindly smile. "I shan't forget your approbation; a musician is never without vanity, and——" Whatever he was going to say he forgot it, or, perhaps, put it off.

At all events he shook hands, smiled, and, with another "good night" to the ladies, he disappeared. Laura, at the window, saw a carriage glide swiftly under the branches of the old spreading trees, and away.

"I'm afraid Mr. Dacre thought you were offended with him," said the elder lady, reprovingly. "It seemed so odd you never said one word about his music, and he was so obliging."

"I dare say; I forgot," answered Challys, rising dreamily. "But that piece of Beethoven's—dear Mary used to play it, and it always makes me sad—and very sad I felt to-night."

"But was not his singing quite magnificent?" exclaimed Julia Wardell.

"I dare say—I suppose so. Was it?" exclaimed Laura Gray.

"Was it, indeed? You're enough to put one out of patience," said Mrs. Wardell. "What did *you* think of it?" she appealed to Charles.

"As I said, I'm no judge; but it seemed to me more like that of a public singer than

an amateur. I should not be surprised if he turned out to be an artist, as they call themselves."

"Oh, no—that's not conceivable!" exclaimed the old lady. "Why, Challys, he says that Mr. Dacre is a public singer!"

"I don't think there is anything theatrical in his manner; but I don't know, I'm sure. I only know that I wish he had not sung that thing from Beethoven. It made me sad, and nothing's so sleepy as sadness. So I think I shall say good night."

Charles came out to the lobby to light her candle for her, and to say "good night" once more.

"Good night, Charlie," she said, with a smile a little sad, but very kind, "and I'm so much obliged to you for coming; it was very good of you."

Up the broad stair she went. He remained looking until she disappeared; then, with a sigh, he returned to the drawing-room, and what more passed between him and Mrs. Wardell was not, I believe, particularly interesting.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE SILVER DRAGON.


As Alfred Dacre placed himself in his brougham he smiled. As they turned the corner at the gate, he looked back at Guildford House—at the drawing-room window, from which the light was gleaming—smiling still, but with a shrewd, odd smile.

The carriage whirled on, and he laughed merrily—*Vive la bagatelle!* Then he grew grave, very grave—sinking down from level to level, till he had reached that point which is deep thought. As we know, his hands were pretty full, and his brain teeming with all kinds of little plans.

When Charles Mannering reached his chambers that night, he found, among more serious letters, a little note in his letter-box,

which could not have been dropped there many minutes. It was signed "Alfred Dacre," and said:—

"MY DEAR MR. MANNERING,—I should so much wish that we knew one another better. There are things on which your advice, by-and-by, would be more useful to me than you can imagine. See what selfish creatures we are! It is this instinct that prompts me to violate forms, and venture to ask you to dine with me to-morrow. Pray do come. You mentioned accidentally this evening that you had no particular engagement for to-morrow except to see the billiard match played. That wont be till eleven. I enclose a note for your friend—Captain Transom, I think—who, you mentioned, is to accompany you. Pray persuade him to come with you first to me. I have written to order dinner at such a quaint comfortable old inn, called the Silver Dragon, just three miles out of town, on the old road to——. All the livery-stable people know it. It is quite an adventure dining there, it is so quaint





suits you better. A line to Miniver's will always find me. Should I not hear, I will conclude that all is settled.

"Ever yours, very truly,

"ALFRED DACRE."

Charles Mannering, as we know, did not like him; but somehow he was flattered. In spite of himself, he smiled as he read it.

"It's a bore, but one can't be absolutely churlish, and he's so very pressing," thought Charles, and the result was that he took his friend, Captain Transom, down with him to the Silver Dragon, where that handsome fellow Dacre received them with a hospitality that was a little ceremonious and foreign, but also very cordial and fascinating.

The Silver Dragon reminds one of the May-Pole in "Barnaby Rudge"—a miniature May-Pole — antique, quaint, and gabled, with stone chimneys, some spiral, some octagonal at the base and cylindrical

upwards, like the barrels of old-fashioned pocket-pistols. There is an old pigeon-house, and half a dozen trees at each side flank the space in front. There is a hedged garden at one side, and tall old pear and cherry trees show themselves in the air. Hollyhocks and roses grow outside, and tint the old place pleasantly, and the great sign of the Silver Dragon swings between two posts at the roadside, with store of florid and gilded ironwork above. I speak of it in the present tense, forgetting the flight of years. I wonder whether the Silver Dragon holds his own still, or has gone, like St. George's, into the land of dreams.

This day there was a cricket match going on in the field in front of the old inn, and the Ticklepitchers were whacking and running with all their might in their second innings. The bright green field, with its clumps of ancient trees and its old-fashioned white paling, with the lively sounds and sights of the cricket match, gave a vivacity to a scene which might otherwise have been perhaps a little drowsy.

what clumsy figure with an unprepossessing countenance, and whiskers, moustache and hair all white. He was smoking a cigar, and from the elevation of the steps he surveyed the landscape.

"Mr. Dacre here?" inquired Charles Mannering of the waiter.

"He's just walked round that way to the oaks,—or, as he pronounced it, *hoax*,—not five minutes ago, to meet two town gentlemen who is for dinner here, ordered at six, sir."

It was plain, from a covert glance, that the waiter suspected the new arrivals to be the two gentlemen who, in his undignified phrase, were "for dinner."

"Well, what shall we do?" said Charles, turning to Transom.

"We may miss if we follow him."

"He'll be here again, sir, in five minutes. He thought you might come that way."

"Ho! that will be Mr. Dacre, then," said

the old fellow in the white hat, interposing unceremoniously—"the young man that's walked round there." He was indicating the direction with the end of his cigar. "I thought I knew his face—I know all about him—is he stopping here?"

"No, sir—only come down for dinner."

"Well, I vote we stay where we are," said Charles, looking at Transom, who agreeing, walked down the steps, and looked about him a little.

Charles, who remembered the white-hatted smoker's remarks about Dacre, addressed a few polite observations to him, which the old fellow received with a shrewd civility. Perhaps he had no objection to talk a little with the young man.

"We've just run down to meet a friend of *yours*, I think you said—Mr. Dacre."

"Well, I can't say a friend, though, by my faith, he should be my friend, for I helped him to one or two *deseerable* things in the way of business; but I have met him only in that way, sir; and that not over frequently; he's a fine young man, sir;

and I know everything about him; and I wish I had his money, sir—by my troth, sir, it wouldn't hurt either of us."

At this moment the waiter apprized the old gentleman that his dinner awaited him.

"Who is that gentleman?" inquired Charles, as soon as he was gone.

"That's Mr. Gillespie, sir. He's a banker, sir, or something, in London, sir."

"Ho! Scotchman, too," reflected Charles, "good men of business—likely to know—I wish his dinner had not been ready so soon—but a man may have money and be a *mauvais sujet*—a banker—that Scotch fellow—it's a convenient title—banker—a usurer—I dare say."

In another moment Dacre had arrived, and they were chatting gaily together.

"I'll run down, if you let me, after dinner, and have a look at those fellows; there's a jolly good hit to leg," said Transom, from the steps at the inn door. It was his farewell speech, as they went into the comfortable long, low dining-room, wainscoted in oak, and with a glass door at the other end

affording a view of the flowers and fruit trees of the garden.

Very friendly was the host; gay, too, and agreeable. An excellent dinner the Silver Dragon afforded, and wine so good that a learned Judge—noted in his day for a shrewd perception of vintages and flavours—used to make a point of dining at that out-of-the-way little hostelry half-a-dozen times in the year.

When they had dined, and had some wine, and chatted pleasantly for a time, Transom remembered the cricket, and, with permission, ran away to see. Now it was a *tête-à-tête*, and Charles Mannering fancied that Dacre was about perhaps to approach some subjects that specially interested him. But he did not. He chatted on very pleasantly, but somehow he was not making himself at all better known to Mr. Mannering, in the sense in which he had expected, nor was he even growing more intimate in any way. He was disclosing nothing of his life and adventures, nor even of his character, for his reflections on life were sea-

soned with a spirit of mockery which left Charles in doubt as to whether they represented anything but the whim of the hour.

Over the chimney-piece clicked an old Louis Quatorze clock, and as he looked into the garden, Charles Mannering fancied he saw his host now and then glance at its dial.

"The fellow thinks I may be in his way at Guildford House, and that I am to be managed by a little flattery and attention, and everything made easy, and a troublesome cousin cajoled. He is counting the minutes till it is time to get away, and laughing at my simplicity."

Charles was nettled. If this dinner was meant to propitiate him, it had no such pleasant effect, but a good deal the reverse.

"I think, Mr. Dacre," said Charles, "I once knew a friend of yours, a Mr. Vanhomrigh?"

"Where did he live?" inquired Dacre.

"He had a very pretty house at Richmond."

“Ha! the very man; then you’ve heard that story?”

Charles had not expected this, and he felt a little awkward. But Mr. Dacre was perfectly himself, and unusually grave, and he continued serenely—

“I did know him—I’ve known all sorts of people in my life—I used to consult him about pictures. Otherwise, I think we’ll agree, your friend was not a desirable acquaintance; but being a man of some learning and great brutality, he was looked upon as a philosopher, and I did not care what he was, he was not pretty; and there was a peculiarity, you recollect, about his head?”

“Ah, perhaps there was, I don’t quite remember.”

“It was this, his head had no brains in it, and so he was always guided by his own strong common *non*-sense. He did me the honour to be jealous of me, although his wife was, upon my honour, as indifferent to me as if she had been my own. He insisted on a duel. I shot him only through both legs—a little higher and I should have rid the



world, and particularly Mrs. Vanhomrigh, of a bore. But while I—if there be any force in the ordeal—was inscribing the proofs of my innocence upon his legs, his wife was testifying to the same fact, in an equally satisfactory manner, by going away with a Mr. Tromperant. We parted—Mr. Vanhomrigh and I—affectionately, and I don't believe he called Mr. Tromperant out."

"Oh!" said Charles, a little dryly: "people used, I've heard, to tell that a little differently."

"Ah! did they? You heard she ran away with quite a different person—with *me*, in fact."

"Well, I confess it was something a little like that—and—and—but it was very absurd," hesitated Charles Mannering.

"Tell me, I entreat, what it was. Don't think me a fool; such things never vex me—nothing offends me in a friend but reserve."

Charles looked at him for a moment shrewdly, and then down, and smiled a little

awkwardly. The inquisitor was suffering more than the person undergoing the question. In fact, the examination was beginning to be inverted, and the *éclaircissement* approached at an inconveniently rapid pace. Mr. Dacre smiled very good naturedly.

"So many things one hears are—are—" hesitated Charles.

"I know—utterly absurd," said Dacre; "but if my friends do hear them, and that they affect me, I protest against being kept in the dark, be it what it may—pray tell me all about it."

"Well the story is that you ran away with her; her husband divorced her, and *you* then married her," said Mannering, with a little shrug and a laugh, making nothing of it.

"Ho! There's the whole epic in a nutshell, and simply a lie from first to last. She went away not with me, but a Mr. Tromperant. I don't know whether Vanhomrigh divorced his wife or not, but I'm ready to swear I never married her."

Here was a short silence.

"Is the woman alive still?" he resumed, perfectly carelessly. "If she is, pray do me the kindness to sift the story to the bottom. I never was married; but it is very clever of you to have collected so many of the apocryphal gospels that profess to record my life, and very good of you, I'm sure, to tell me what they say."

"One can't help hearing things, you know; and as you wished me to tell you all about these stories, I could not well refuse."

"I can never thank you enough. Fame has, however, done me too much honour. I did not marry Vanhomrigh's wife; and as to divorce, in this shameless and cold-blooded age, I don't know why people ever think of it, seeing that marriage is itself a standing divorce, without the inconvenience or the scandal, and with this advantage, that husband and wife can resume one another whenever they choose. I'm not speaking my sentiments, mind, but those of a great many people of my acquaintance."

"I quite understand," said Mannering, and sipped a little claret.

“And quite to put an end to that part of the rumour, which, you see, is not pleasant. The next time you and I meet Ardenbroke together, I will ask him the question in your presence. When does he return, by-the-by?”

“I believe his stay in Scotland is likely to be longer than he expected. But, pray, don’t mind asking him, or, if you should, *I* have no right in the world to be present, and I should not like it.”

“Ah, Mr. Mannering, do you think that quite fair?” said Dacre, with a smile, and a little shake of his head. “I find you’re possessed of a variety of disagreeable stories about me—utterly untrue—and one of them such as no man ought to leave unanswered. Now, as I find you in a position to circulate that report, I put it to your honour—*reflect*—have I not a right to ask permission to arm you with its contradiction?”

“No man can help hearing reports as they circulate. You have contradicted that one in my presence,” said Charles, “and, of course, I can have no difficulty in saying I’ve heard you do so.”

"No; you're very good—that's quite true," said Dacre, "and my denial will be accepted for precisely what it is worth—you are good enough to set as high a value almost as I do upon it—but it will be rated at the value the world places on all such currency. It is the denial simply of the person interested in denying it, don't you see? and although you and I know it is true, the world wont, and in that bank it wont be accepted."

"Unlucky for you, Mr. Dacre; but still I can't see that I am called on to ask for, or publish Ardenbroke's testimony in the matter, and I must, once for all, decline the kind of prominence you are good enough to propose for me."

"I wish, dear Mannering, I could agree with you;" and suddenly changing his subject with a change of tone, he said, "the sun is already down; and that beautiful moon—it will become more brilliant as the glow in the west fades away—delicious evening! What do you say to a walk across the fields?"

"Yes, quite charming," said Charles, recovering.

"A glass of sherry before we start?" said Dacre—"Delicious evening, certainly! That sort of sky sets a fellow ruminating. What a background for a reverie—pleasant, of course, *couleur de rose*, old echoes mix in our music—we are always looking over our shoulders as we march on—retrospective creatures—we are. I was popular, I have been so consistently; of course, one can't be popular, unless one is a great deal more amusing than I can ever hope or attempt to be, without money, for poverty is universally disgusting. I have good spirits. I have a sort of commiseration for fools. I enjoy the ridiculous without exposing it; and I am under no constraint with knaves; in short, I am conscious of some ingredients of a man of the world."

"That's a character I don't aspire to—I feel my incompetence.—I have not the moral talents," said Charles.

"How tiresome," added Mannering.

inwardly—"that fellow's incessant talk about himself!"

And recovering from this incoherent little digression, Dacre returned to his projected ramble over the sheep-walk.

"We can get through that little garden to the path, I know it perfectly. The walk is quite Arcadian; just at the other side of that foreground, you get into an undulating sheep-walk, wooded with old timber, and utterly solitary; the loneliest place you ever saw in your life; a very singular scene. I undertake to say you'll never forget it while you live. But take some more wine, wont you?"

"Not any, thanks."

"Some coffee."

"No, thanks. Where does the path come out upon the old London road?"

"Not a mile from this."

Charles pushed open the glass-door, and walked a few steps into the quaint little garden, and looked westward, where the quickly fading tints of a splendid sunset still flushed and gilded the sky.

Dacre touched the bell—

“This is all right, is it?”

“Yes, sir, to be paid by the old gentleman—Scotch, I think he is, sir, upstairs, we know him here, sir.”

“Yes, and there’s a message. Where is Captain Transom?”

“Talking outside with the gentleman as played in the match, sir.”

“Well, tell him that Mr. Mannering has gone across the fields, and will meet him about a mile on the road to London. Tell the driver to pull up at the Seven Oaks stile; he knows it; and say to Captain Transom that Mr. Mannering will probably be there before he arrives, and don’t let him delay here.”

Then Dacre walked out and joined Charles Mannering among the trees and flowers in the deepening twilight.



## CHAPTER XIV.

### A MOONLIT WALK.

THROUGH a little wicket in the hedge Mr. Dacre led him, and at the other side of the narrow bye-road on which it opened was a stile, by which they mounted to the path he had indicated.

“How rapidly that sunset glow is fading,” said Dacre, “the transition from sunset to moonlight, how beautiful it is! There is a brief struggle of the two—the dark crisis of the process. To me, it always seemed like the passing of a life, from this beautiful world to the more beautiful world of spirits, through the momentary darkness of death.”

“But what of Transom?” said Charles, who was not much of a poet, “we can’t leave him behind.”

"It's all right, he's gone on in your carriage to meet you at the stile, a little way on. Let us get up this little steep, and from the top you'll see that pretty Arcadia. How balmy and delicious the air is this evening?"

"Yes, certainly, it is," said Charles, stopping for a moment, and looking upward to the stars.

"This is about the most puzzling light," said Dacre; "by the time we reach that little eminence the struggle will have ended, and the moonlight will prevail."

They sauntered slowly up the slope in silence, and by the time they reached its crest, a brilliant moonlight silvered the landscape below them.

"Now, look there; is not it charming—that wavy slope, studded with straggling clumps of trees? You can't see the road; the sward looks as if it passed unbroken into those misty low grounds, miles away. I think it quite beautiful. It is so park-like, neglected, and solitary."

"Yes, it does look like a place where an

ambuscade would have you at a disadvantage," said Charles Mannering. "A sheep-walk, you say?"

"Well, you may be a painter—I know you're a musician—but there's no tempting you to be a poet," said Dacre, with a faint laugh. "You are determined to be an Englishman. You can see objects now pretty well—the trunk of that tree, for instance. I can see all the knots and wrinkles in it, and it's twenty yards away." He looked at his watch. "Yes, I can see it perfectly," and he looked shrewdly down the slope as if in search of some distant object. "Let us get on; how sharp our shadows look upon the grass."

"Yes, the mist has nearly melted; it is like a frosty moonlight," said Charles, as they marched lightly along, side by side, "and yet the air is so soft."

"Yes, a frosty moonlight," agreed Dacre, "and before we reach that group of birch trees—how wonderfully light and graceful they are, and those silvery stems—before we get there it will be more intense still. I

never saw such moonlight on an English landscape ; just as if it came for us. It *is*, really, come on purpose."

He stopped on a little eminence again as it seemed searching in the distance for some expected object.

"Looking for anything?" inquired Mannering.

"Yes—a—nothing very particular—we'll see it time enough—my carriage, and a friend waiting in it. I expect it—that's all. It certainly is a delicious night, and, as you say, a miraculously brilliant moonlight. *There* yes, that's it, I think."

"Where?" asked Mannering, who stopped at his side.

"Do you see that little, broken eminence at your right, with an ash tree growing by it?"

"Yes," said Charles, pointing towards it.

"That's what I mean. Well, a good deal further on is a clump of several trees—oaks they are—and a little to the right of them is a carriage, I think," said Dacre, in a slow conjectural way.

"Yes, I see—it is, I think," said Mannering.

"It *certainly* is," said Dacre in a tone of relief. "Well, it has been a very charming walk. So sweet a night tempts one to linger."

There had been growing in Dacre's manner, Charles thought, something *distract* and odd that was oppressive. He paused, and placed his hand gently on Charles's arm, and smiling faintly, he said—

"And now, dear Mannering, to resume—I was going to say, a little more at length, what I venture to hope, and even to expect from your kindness."

"Resume, you say?"

"Yes, if you allow me."

"All right," said Charles, "I'll hear you with pleasure."

"I hope—in fact I am sure—I have only to throw myself on your good feeling to ensure the few and reasonable concessions which on reflection appear to me, under the circumstances I shall describe, quite indispensable."

These words sounded very unpleasantly in Charles Mannering's ears, and he felt for a moment as if he had mis-heard him.

"And, on consideration, I have every hope they will strike you in the same light," continued Dacre. "Suppose we go on slowly toward those trees; the stile is there, and both carriages now—don't you see two?"

"Yes, I believe there are," said Charles, who began to feel as if he were walking in a dream.

"I mentioned, you recollect, what I thought myself warranted in expecting from your own sense of justice, with respect to the absurd, and, in some of its consequences, cruel rumour, which I have too much reason to believe you have been the instrument, of course with the most honourable intentions, of reviving."

"I thought, Mr. Dacre, I had made myself sufficiently clear upon that matter."

"Quite—perfectly clear; but with your

intelligence and good feeling, I don't at all despair of bringing you to see it a little differently—in fact, to take precisely my view of what is fair in this case, before we reach that clump of trees, which it wont take us five minutes to do.”

“Very well,” said Charles.

“Yes, both carriages *are* there,” said Dacre, who had been continuing his scrutiny while he talked.

“Yes, I do see them now,” acquiesced Charles.

“And about what I was saying—we none of us like, my dear Mr. Mannering, the idea of constraint—the consciousness that we are watched, and the feeling that behind our backs all sorts of stories are being collected, and, perhaps, being retailed. Would you mind not walking quite so fast? Thanks; and it is not merely disagreeable; positive inconvenience, and even injury may result from it.”

“I don't care a farthing who watches *me*,” said Charles.

“That is because you are so frank and

manly, and have in reality nothing to conceal. Now, it is not quite so with me—at this moment I can't be frank—in the interest altogether of others. I can't be, in that sense, manly. Serious mischief to others might result from my making my presence in London known, except to a very few; and, my dear Mannering, I am going to represent to you how hard you have been upon me—to make my little complaint and appeal; and I shan't tire you—you shall know all that is in my mind in three minutes' time."



## CHAPTER XV.

### THE ULTIMATUM.

“AN appeal *ad misericordiam*,” thought Charles, with a secret satisfaction. “He’ll be disappointed in me; I’m not, I rather think, a person to be flattered or cajoled. He thinks I have an influence at Guildford House, and he intends to use it. Very good, Mr. Dacre, we shall see.”

“I have persuaded you to come and dine with me in this out-of-the-way place,” continued Dacre, “shall I confess it?—with an object. With you I can afford to be perfectly candid, and I shall speak with the confidence of a brother. Ah! Mr. Mannering, Mr. Mannering, you have been treating me very oddly; haven’t you?” He smiled archly, and shook his head as he

placed his hand gently on Charles Manner-  
ing's arm. " You followed me when I took  
my leave, on the night of my visit to your  
chambers ; you followed me, on another  
night, all the way to the Fleet, when I went  
to see that miserable fellow, Guy de Beau-  
mirail ; and you have been busy among your  
friends, at the clubs, collecting all the old  
women's tales affecting me that your gossip-  
ing friends could bring to mind—scandals,  
falsehoods, I do assure you, if you but knew  
the circumstances, the most incredible, and  
the blackest ; and with this evidence, you  
array a case for the ear of that very tribu-  
nal by which we all desire to be favourably  
heard, and at least fairly judged—private  
friendship. Ah ! my good friend, is that  
generous, or just, or at all the measure by  
which you would have it measured to you  
again ? "

" You admit, Mr. Dacre," said Charles,  
" that you are practising, necessarily just  
now, a strict reserve. That, of course, is a  
matter entirely for yourself, and which, I'm  
quite aware, it would be most impertinent

of me to remark on ; in fact, I can have no interest in it so long as it does not involve anyone who has a natural claim upon my care, and—and that sort of thing. But those circumstances of concealment, you know, don't do so well to found new acquaintances and intimacies upon, especially in families where there is so little experience and knowledge of the world, as in that at Guildford House ; and as they know absolutely nothing, except a word or two, of no real importance, from Ardenbroke, whom you have put under conditions of reserve—I, as one of Miss Gray's few relations, and the only one at present near her, think myself obliged to inquire a little, and, in fact, take some little trouble, such as a brother, if she had one, ought to take in such a case ; and I can't see that in doing so I commit the slightest impertinence."

"How provoking, dear Mannering, that we should so entirely differ in opinion in a thing so nearly affecting both of us—I may say personally affecting us. Would you mind stopping here for a moment? We

have got so near the road, and I want ever so little talk with you quietly. Thanks."

He looked upward for a moment with a meditative smile. The transparent azure of heaven opened above him with hardly a filmy cloud in its great concave; and the brightness of the moon was almost dazzling. Etherealized in that wonderful light, his handsome features for a moment moved the admiration even of Charles Mannering. For a few seconds the faint, fixed smile was seen in that light, and then Mr. Dacre looked, still smiling, in Charles Mannering's face.

"I wish so much, my dear Mannering, I could persuade you to take a different view of your duty."

A pause occurred here, but Mannering made no sign.

"Because otherwise the situation becomes so painful."

There was another pause, but Charles only looked down, and switched the grass slightly with his cane; he was not going to recede.

“For I can’t allow that kind of thing to go on, do you see; I can’t, really, for one hour more.”

Charles looked up in his face, with an inquisitive sternness; he did not quite see his drift. Dacre’s handsome features still wore that faint smile, and he shook his head gently.

“No, indeed, Mr. Mannering: I’m sorry it has come to this, but I can’t. We must understand one another; I shall be perfectly explicit; and I still venture to hope that, on reflection, you will see the reasonableness of what I have to propose.”

Here was a wait of a second or more.

“Pray go on. I don’t see—I confess I don’t understand at present,” said Charles Mannering a little stiffly.

“Well, as I say, I still speak in hope. I have one or two very simple and, I think, fair conditions to propose. If you agree with me in so thinking, and consequently accept them, we continue good friends; if not, why then it is very unlucky, and I’m very sorry.”

“ And what are your conditions, as you call them ?” asked Charles.

“ Yes, my conditions ; well, they are just these—you have followed me about on two occasions, to my knowledge ; well, it is only fair that I should ask that all that sort of thing, whether done by yourself, or your friend, or your servant, should totally cease ; you have been making inquiries about me, the places I frequent, and so on. I have to entreat of you to make no more inquiries about me. That’s also quite clear.”

Here was a silence while you could count two, but Charles Mannering made no sign.

“ You have been collecting foolish stories about me, and possibly retailing them ; I quite excuse you, but I must stipulate also that all *that* shall absolutely cease ; and lastly, dear Mannering, not at all seeing in your remote cousinship your obligation to charge yourself with the duties of a brother to Miss Gray, and not choosing while myself employed by that lady upon a difficult and not unimportant affair, to be watched and misapprehended, I have one more ear-

nest and friendly request to submit, and that is, that for the present your visits at Guildford House shall be discontinued."

At this last demand Charles Mannering flushed up to his temples.

"By Jove!" said he, with an angry laugh, "that's cool, isn't it? I don't think I ever heard anything so impertinent in all my life, by heaven!"

"I was half afraid you'd think so," said Mr. Dacre, "still while a hope was possible I ventured to try; and since my little proposal has fallen through, there only remains the unpleasant alternative. It can all be arranged in a few minutes."

"I don't understand you; but if you mean that we should fight, I'll meet you when and where you like; and the sooner the better," said Charles Mannering sharply, with gleaming eyes, and a face now pale and contracted.

He had been on the point of striking Dacre with the little walking-stick he clutched tightly in his fingers.

Dacre smiled and nodded slightly.

“No need to wait a moment; your friend, Captain Transom, can speak to mine, who’s here, also; and he’ll find everything that is necessary. This light will answer perfectly.”

“I dare say; I don’t care; as bad for one as the other.”

Incensed, agitated, Charles Mannering strode onward and under the old oaks, over the stile.

“By Jove, I thought you’d never come down from your moonlight and poetry,” said Transom, whose head was sticking out of the window, “the Ticklepitchers won, I suppose you heard, with five wickets to go down. Anything wrong? what’s the matter?” he added, observing the expression of his friend’s face.

“Nothing—just a word—get out for a moment, and walk a bit up here,” answered Charles.



## CHAPTER XVI.

### ONE—TWO.

“TRANSOM, I’ve got into a scrape—a row with that fellow, and I suppose we must fight,” said Charles, in a low tone, looking very grim and pale.

“What fellow? What the deuce? What’s the row?” inquired Transom, very much astonished.

“That fellow Dacre—I don’t know what he is—I suppose he’s gentleman enough to be shot at, and upon my soul he’s the most impertinent snob, besides, that I could have imagined.”

“But what’s the quarrel, and what do you want, and what are you going to do?” demanded Transom.

“Going to fight, I suppose,” said Charles.

“Well, but that’s quite gone out now, you know, and by Jove they make it a very serious business—you know all about that,” said Captain Transom, uneasily.

“I’m very sorry, Transom, to give you any trouble, but you were always such a good fellow, and I know you won’t see your old school-fellow floored for want of some one to stand by him.”

“No—*certainly*—of course—but *what is*—”

“Oh, it’s just impertinence—he wants me to consent to things—in fact, to do what I *won’t* do, and to let him bully me.”

“I’d like to settle it, though. Who’s that fellow coming up the field towards us—can’t it be arranged, hang it?”

“I think not—I’m sure it can’t—there’s no way except by my submitting to be bullied by that cur, and, whatever his reason, it must go on.”

“That’s Dacre’s man, I suppose—why I haven’t had time to think—it’s very odd if nothing can be done,” said Captain Transom, “surely there can be nothing to make a shot so inevitable.”

The tall, slim gentleman was approaching, having raised his hat from his head in courteous salutation, and was now only little more than a dozen steps away.

"Yes," said Mannering, lifting his hat in return—"very likely—and if it is, mind, no compromise. Dacre wants me to make submissions such as no gentleman could dream of. I have nothing whatever to say—if he chooses to recede he may, but otherwise this thing must go on—for I'll *not* give way, not an inch."

The Frenchman, for so he turned out to be, now presented himself with a very grave and ceremonious courtesy to Charles Mannering, and begged, in rather laborious and grotesque English, an introduction to his friend.

There was something in the serene and business-like manner of this gentleman amounting, in Mannering's opinion, to evidence of his having been brought down to this place for the express service in which he was now busy—a very cold-blooded pro-

cedure—and the sense of this made Charles a little haughty, and even surly.

He presented his friend Captain Transom and walked away some score steps.

Was it a dream? With intense excitement comes a sort of quietude which answers the purposes of coolness quite the reverse of that insensibility which phlegmatic natures exhibit. This is not akin to dullness and relaxation—it is the highest tension to which human nerves can be drawn, and awakes to its keenest perception every sense.

In this state, so unlike the normal life, he turned about and saw the tall, slight figure of the Frenchman, standing close to the stouter figure of his friend Transom. The colloquy did not last five minutes. Charles was walking to and fro with measured tread, like a sentinel. Transom turned and approached him.

Charles Mannering advanced a step or two to meet him. He knew by Transom's face before he spoke that there was nothing cheerful to report.

"Well, that old French fellow, very gentlemanlike he is, but he says Mr. Dacre can't withdraw or qualify any one of the conditions he proposes—that he conceives your looking after him, and inquiring, to be a perpetual insult, and that you would use opportunities, were he to permit a continuation of your visits in a certain quarter, for purposes of your own, and with the effect of frustrating his exertions to be of use where he has promised his services."

"He lies, then," exclaimed Charles.

"Of course he does—Dacre I mean; and have you perfectly made up your mind, is it really worth having this thing go on?"

"I can't help it; I won't be bullied by that fellow; it must go on."

"Well, it's devilish odd they want to fight now," said Transom.

"Certainly, I'd much rather now, this moment; but where can we get pistols? It's a long way into town," said Charles.

"They have brought two cases and everything quite fair; I'm to have choice, but the time, the hour, you know, although

there's light, it's so unusual; there was, to be sure, that duel about two months ago in the Bois de Boulogne; but on that ground we may, of course, put it off till morning. What do you say?"

"Don't put it off a moment; I hate delay; let us have it at once and have done with it," said Charles.

"Well, you know, for my part, I agree with you; I'd rather have it now and over, a great deal; have you ever been in a thing of this kind before?"

"Never; but I've fired pistols, of course, often."

"I see, they're bringing in those things—I must be off in a minute—but never you mind—you'll be all right if you do as I tell you."

Charles, looking down the slope saw the tall, slight figure of the Frenchman carrying a flat box in his hand, and followed closely by a man bearing a second like it. Of course he knew very well what these things were.

"I was going to say, I think that fellow

---

Dacre is vicious—you must hit him if you can the first shot. Do you know anything of shooting? you'll have to fire at the word, you know—ready, fire, and a good-natured fellow will always say it as quick as he can to prevent mischief.”

“Thanks, I see; no, I know nothing of pistols—nothing since I was a boy shooting at a board.”

“I know; well, I shall have to go in a moment, so listen. I won't set the hair-trigger, if it has one; I'll give you the pistol at full-cock; when you take it you must keep your arm loose, on no account stiffen it as you raise it, just trace with your eye an imaginary line along the grass between the muzzle of your pistol and your adversary's body. There, that fellow's bowing. In a moment, monsieur, I shall do myself the honour to attend you,” he called aloud, and added in the low key in which he had been speaking, “Let your arm swing slightly in the direction of that line, so that when the word comes you can carry it right up to the level, keep it extended all the time,

swing it from the shoulder, you are not to bend it for the world, you understand; now I must go."

Down the slope he went, apologizing to monsieur as he approached. Charles Mannering continued his march backward and forward and saw them, not thirty yards away, arranging what are called the preliminaries, dividing the weapons, and then proceeding to load them.

Charles Mannering was no coward, but the minutes so passed were anything but comfortable. "However long the time may seem," he thought, "ten minutes, in reality, must see this sickening business over and all settled, one way or other," and this thought constantly recurring helped him through the interval.

And now the adversaries were placed. It was to be a duel after the English fashion. The two men, each stationary in his place, to fire together—"one, two," the word being *two*.

Charles saw the French gentleman place his pistol in Dacre's hand, and add a con-



fidential word or two, with extended palms and a little shrug.

"Now, think nothing about him but that you're sure to hit him," said Transom, quite steady, but looking pale and excited, "and mind, old fellow, don't touch the trigger a moment too soon, and measure a line from your foot to his, and keep your arm straight, and swinging from the *shoulder*, mind, and when all's ready look hard and steady at your man till you can see nothing else. You'll wing him the first shot; and I'll bet you what you like he doesn't go near you."

With these encouraging words he withdrew. The cold intense moonlight showed him the slender figure of Dacre as sharply defined as if it had been in daylight, and struck brightly on the barrel of the pistol.

Transom, it had been agreed, was to give the word. "Gentlemen," said he, addressing them from his safe point of observation, "you don't move until I've done speaking; when all's ready I shall say, 'One, two,' and at the word *two*, you fire; and now,

gentlemen, if you are not ready, say so."

They were both silent, and perfectly motionless.

"One, two," cried Transom.

Instantaneously a sharp report followed, and the thin film of smoke blew across the air between the combatants. Charles Mannering staggered a short step or two backward, and fell to the ground.

In a moment Captain Transom had run up, and was kneeling at his side. It was a comfort to see that Charles was still living.

"Not much, I hope ; how is it?"

"Hit somewhere—I don't know—will you try to get me out of this like a good fellow?"—said Mannering, speaking very low, and with difficulty.

"Hurt, not badly, I hope?"—said Dacre, now standing close by Transom.

The French gentleman was already at the other side, and stooping over the patient—looked by no means so much put out as the other gentlemen.

Transom liked Charles Mannering very well ; Charles was a very good fellow ; he would take some trouble for Charles, and even run a risk, as he had just now shown. But he had no aptitudes for nurse-tending—and so rigidly does every man refer things to himself, and measure them by their relations to that interesting person, that Captain Transom—although half a minute had hardly passed—was already discussing with himself the best way of getting rid of so intolerable a bore without being positively ill-natured.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### DRIVE TO TOWN.

AN unexpected fourth person was added at this moment to the group.

"Canny, now, lads—canny, now," cried a harsh voice, with a broad, Scottish intonation; and Mr. Gillespie, who had been nearer than they supposed, came up to the little group; looking grim and dismayed, and a good deal blown from his run down a bit of the hill.

"Hallo! what the deil's all this—who's hurt? Mister Mannering, by the law! Guide us! who's been settin' ye by the lugs, ye pair of fules!" He resumed.

Alfred Dacre, still unconsciously holding his smoking pistol in his hand, was looking with a frown of pain into the face of Charles

Mannering. There were a great many unpleasant feelings mingled in his suspense. He knew that of men hit in duels, hardly one in twenty lost his life; and he was willing to back the chances, and stand the hazard of the die. It would be too bad if the one throw he dreaded should turn up.

"Are ye deleerit, mon?" exclaimed the Scot, very much out of breath, with a very black look in the face of Mr. Dacre—"I thocht ye'd hae keepit your word, sir."

"I thought ye'd hae keepit your place, sir," retorted Dacre, with a bitter imitation of his broad Scotch, and so dangerous a glare in his dark eyes as showed that the insult was not meant in a spirit of fun—"what the devil brings you here?" And he glanced up the moonlight slopes, thinking, perhaps, that some one had accompanied him, and spoke very sternly.

"Weel, I don't know," said the elder man, more quietly, "I don't know why I'm here, I'm sure, except that I'm such a gude-natured guse; and I think it's

a bad business this, for I doubt ye've killed him."

"No sign of death there," muttered Dacre.

"I wish I was sure o' it; but get ye down to the carriage, and away to the toon—will ye?"

Without minding what he was saying, Dacre had addressed himself to the tall Frenchman, who was conversing affably, though nobody was listening to him. He had seen friends on the fields of battle with all sorts of gunshot wounds, and having, as a patient, once had, himself, a considerable hospital experience, was politely 'illuminating the party in voluble French, upon the case before him; and, kneeling on the turf, he felt his pulse, and pronounced that Charles Mannering would do very well, and looked, nevertheless, uneasily about, and was clearly of Mr. Gillespie's way of thinking, about the expediency of betaking themselves to the carriage which awaited them on the road hard by.

"We had better get him down to the inn—had not we?" said Dacre.

"Hout—never fash your beard about that, mon—come away, will ye—come wi' me—come I say, or ye'll sup sorrow for it."

"D—n you, be quiet, sir; I'll not go till I know how the case is."

"And d—n you for a daft loon," retorted Mr. Gillespie, savagely, muttering it, however, between his teeth, by way of soliloquy, as he turned away to another of the party.

"You'll be Mr. Thransom, I take it, sir," he said, taking that gentleman with rather a hard grip above the elbow, "I don't know, sir, how this thing fell—a quarrel may be, about a lassie—a limmer, I warrant; and I don't mean to speer any questions about it; but it wont do, sir, letting that fule Dacre stay here till some o' they constable folk clap a grip on his shoulder—it wont do, sir: and there is a doctor—Doctor Browning, they caud him, down there in the Silver Dragon. Just take your friend gently round by the road back again to the inn, de ye see, in his carriage,

and ye'll tell 'em it was a mischance shootin' at a mark, or such like, wi' a pistol ; and ye'll be sae gude as to drap me a line—here's my card—just to say how the fulish lad's doin', so soon as the doctor has made his examination and deeagnosis, ye comprehend ; and don't keep him here, mind, on the ground a minute longer, ye may lose the doctor else, or lose the lad's life. I'm a gude-haired fule, sir, and I don't like to see young blude spilt, or mair mischief come o' it than need be ; and get him awa', now, and he'll do weel, and there'll be no more fass about it, and it will all be forgot, they'll mak' it up ; the dirt will rub out when its dry, and I and that French chap will try and tak' the chield Dacre away with us to toon."

There was reason in all this, though the old Scotchman spoke it in no small agitation and ire ; and with their united persuasions he and the Frenchman at length induced Dacre, but not till they had got Mannering into his carriage with Transom, and seen it start for the Silver Dragon, to get into theirs



and accompany them in a very rapid drive toward London.

Dacre rolled his cloak about him, and seemed disposed to take a nap in the corner, while the Frenchman was garrulous, and Mr. Gillespie sat by way of listening, glowering very surlily in his place, which was nearly opposite the dozing form of Mr. Dacre, who on a sudden laughed at some amusing recollections, it might be, and looked gaily out on the moon-lighted hedges.

"What for do you laugh, sir?" demanded Mr. Gillespie, rather harshly.

"Never you fash your beard about that," rejoined Mr. Dacre; "isn't that the proper phrase? though what fashing a beard is, is a mystery known only to Scotchmen," he added reflectively.

"I doubt ye've killed the chield Man-nering; I see naething to laugh at—*nae-thing*," Mr. Gillespie replied with the emphasis of an oath.

"I don't want you to laugh; I don't think either the sight or sound would be

agreeable. I laugh when I'm disposed, and I don't think the chield Mannering is more likely to die of his little hurt than any one of us in this carriage. What do you think, monsieur?"

"I should not wonder," said monsieur in his own tongue, "if that young gentleman were quickly to re-establish himself. The wounds of young people in good estate cure themselves so quickly, one may see him possibly to walk himself of street in street in your so beautiful city of London before many days pass themselves."

"I don't hope it, monsieur; perhaps because I don't wish it," said Mr. Dacre. "Try one of these cigarettes. I object to his dying—I object also to his recovering more rapidly than is quite convenient."

Here Mr. Gillespie pressed his foot significantly on that of the speaker.

"One of these?" said Mr. Dacre, tendering his cigarettes.

"No, no, I thank ye, I like one o' they fellows better," and he produced a huge cigar which he prepared to smoke.

The Frenchman having a store of cigarettes in his own case kept up the fire steadily, enlivening the process by short but animated spurts of conversation.

Dacre tired first of smoking.

"The Scotch are a metaphysical people, and your brilliant nation, monsieur, are more ingenious and philosophical than we English. I was on the point of talking psychology, but I'm half afraid in such a presence."

"Monsieur may have fear of Monsieur Gillespie, perhaps, but of me it is impossible; I should listen, I assure monsieur, with more of pleasure and instruction than I can express to his charming discourses."

"You do me too much honour, monsieur, you tempt me to try; and as you are a man of *politesse auprès des dames*, like my friend Monsieur Gillespie——"

Here was an impatient grunt from the Scotchman.

"Suppose we talk of that inexhaustible mystery, the *beau sexe*, monsieur—that most charming of Nature's enigmas."

"I wonder whether that chap's dead yet," interrupted Mr. Gillespie, with savage impatience.

"What chap?" inquired Dacre.

"The chap ye've maist murdered," answered the Scot.

"Now, come, we advised one another not to fash our beards, didn't we? and that's a disagreeable subject," said Dacre. "He's not dead—he's not going to die; we have my excellent friend, Monsieur Droqueville's word for that; haven't we, monsieur?"

"Yes, monsieur, I am well assured; I have had some experience, and I am extremely happy that I dare to pronounce an opinion favourable to the young gentleman who suffers under a stroke of pistol—(how you say?)—an accident so unfortunate; the lead is placed in the most desirable way for that young gentleman. I have taken the liberty to look under his waistcoat, and I know precisely, for I have seen at different times three persons wounded in the same place, which, if you permit, I will explain."

"On no account, monsieur," replied Dacre

with prompt politeness. "I quite assent to the conclusion, and the reasons might only unsettle our convictions. You now hear, Monsieur Gillespie, what my gallant friend Colonel Droqueville says upon that subject, and I hope you don't mean to contradict him."

"I don't suppose the colonel is a doctor," said Mr. Gillespie sourly, "they're two very different trades, sir, asking your pardon, colonel; the colonel has a gude opinion how best to drive a bullet into your body, but it's not his business to get it out again, nor to tell you what it's like to do for you while it is there."

"Well, I'll not be bored any more about him," said Dacre sharply; "I really thought I was rid of that subject for to-night at least, and I'd be glad to know how one is to get rid of a bore if shooting him wont do?"

"I doubt it may do for him and you both," said Mr. Gillespie angrily.

"I've told you before I don't mean to talk about him," said Dacre with an odd laugh, "and you shan't; I don't care a far-

thing who I quarrel with to-night—I'm quite in that vein."

"It's well, mayhap, for some folk I'm never in that vein," retorted Mr. Gillespie, with an angry sneer. "It's a game that two must play at, if it's played at all; and ye ken verra weel, sir, ye hae nae such fule to deal wi' in me, Mr. Dacre."

"Fool? Certainly, in some respects he's no fool," said Dacre, contemplatively. "I'll tell you, however, if you intend croaking any more, that I shall take it as meaning that it is better you should be quite free to turn back and see the patient, and I shall set you down. I mean to return to town, and you can walk back to the Silver Dragon and help to nurse Mr. Mannering. It will be very good-natured, but I'm hanged if I endure any more talk about him in this carriage."

Mr. Dacre was talking with an excitement that was very like the menacing jocularly of a quarrelsome man who has been drinking; wine, however, had nothing to do with it, and the odd state of his temper and spirits

arose, I suppose, from the transactions of the evening and his nervous suspense about Mannering."

"Daft," muttered Gillespie; "he's lost his wits," and turning away with an angry sniff he assumed that he had asserted himself, at least as much as was expedient.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### PISTOLS AND GENTLEMEN COME HOME.

“I WAS going to say, monsieur, when Mr. Gillespie was so good as to amuse us with another subject, that I should like very much to know exactly why I ever did anything in all my life—even this little affair in which you were so good as to lend me, as you once did before in another part of the world, your counsel and support, and become my right arm. I feel like a man who has waked from a dream. I wonder why I cared to take any step in the matter, and I am disposed to ask your pardon, monsieur, for having given you so much trouble.”

Monsieur assured his friend Mr. Dacre, that there was no trouble, and that he was infinitely charmed of having been able to render his service.



"Monsieur is a philanthropist, and says so to satisfy my self-reproach. Was ever known moonlight so fortunate! how brilliant! no image fresh from the chisel ever showed sharper than the young gentleman who is comfortably in his bed, I hope, by this time; but you observed, no doubt, the distance seemed greater than it was; the illusion, however, did not avail. May I try one of your cigarettes, monsieur, they perfume so deliciously."

So, for a time they all three smoked together in silence, and the atmosphere of the interior grew hazy. One cigarette satisfied Mr. Dacre this time, and that light quickly burns out. He leaned back for a little, then out of the window. "London! What a hell London really is, and how I like it," mused Mr. Dacre, who was feverish and fidgetty, and could endure nothing long that evening.

"We devils, Mr. Gillespie, have our affinities—our paradise is in the infernal," continued Dacre.

"I don't believe in devils nor paradise

neither, except a fule's paradise, and very densely populated, I warrant you," sneered Mr. Gillespie.

"Very densely, sir, and I take the Fleet prison to be one of its suburbs, where a lot of fools are locked up for spending the money of other fools, who grin and swear at them through the bars."

"And who do you allude to, sir?" demanded Mr. Gillespie, angrily.

"Well, one of the inhabitants of that paradise is a friend of ours; I visit him now and then, perhaps you're aware, and so do you; but he owes me no money, and, therefore, I don't look foolish when I see him."

Mr. Gillespie did not like that joke at all, and muttering so as not to be audible, however—"Ye'll look foolish enough one day, my fine fellow, if ye let your tongue wag as ye're doing."

He turned away, and settled in his corner and resumed his cheroot vigorously.

"Green—green—green," murmured Mr. Dacre enigmatically, as he looked out of the

carriage window ; “ tiresome thing green is ; paradise—simplicity—verdure—moonshine ; yes, I like the other world better ; yellow stucco—red brick—gas light—and d—d clever fellows—devils. The angelic life is insupportable insipidity.”

And with a sigh and a shrug he threw himself back in his seat, and his discourse went rambling on.

“ I wish I were altogether a devil ; I’m perplexed and made inefficient by stupid yearnings after Eden ; a divided being is self-torture, not a grain of conscience or *all* conscience,—anything between is loss of force and deep-seated incurable pain.”

Mr. Dacre was so obviously rhodomontading in soliloquy, and the noise of the carriage broke the continuity of hearing so effectually that the politeness of Monsieur Droqueville suffered no violence in his quiet attention to the flavour of his cigarette, which precluded any attempt to convert his comrade’s reverie into a colloquy.

Mr. Dacre repeated to himself some well-known verses thus :—

"That proud dame, for whom his soul  
Was burnt within him to a coal,  
Used him so like a base rascallion,  
That old *Pyg* (what d'ye call him) *Malion*,  
That cut his mistress out of stone,  
Had not so hard a hearted one."

Mr. Dacre smiled in his meditation.

"Yes," continued he, "they are very odd cats. It is a great pity that philosophy has not weighed, measured, and analysed them. We talk of human nature, and we mean *men's* nature; feminine human nature—a thing by itself—has never been analysed by grave psychologists; we leave it to be dogmatized on by the frivolous and the libertine, a study on which a metaphysician might easily go mad. Mad!" he repeated, "I sometimes think I am."

And then this volatile young gentleman began to hum an air from an opera.

"It is the nature of the lioness," he suddenly resumed, returning from music to metaphysics; "an instinct for picking out the grandest mate, whether they like him or not, and so with a vain-glory strangely humble, to make him their boast, and their

sex's envy their hapiness. Yes, mesdemoiselles, if the lioness is not satisfied with her suitor, when they take their moonlight walk together in the jungle, she roars and roars, despite the uneasiness of her lover, till from a distant jungle comes an answering roar, and nearer, and nearer, and nearer, and so a battle—and she secures the benefit of competition and the finer animal for a mate; and what, young ladies, is your courtesy at St. James's—your coming out and all that? Is it not your way of roaring and inviting from all circumjacent jungles those lions whom it may concern?"

Now came another silence, during which Mr. Dacre amused himself by gazing, with his head out at the window, upon the landscape, all shrouded in the snowy moonlight. It did not induce serenity, however, so he thought he would try tobacco again.

"May I light this at yours? a thousand thanks, monsieur."

And so, another cigarette, and then Dacre returned to his reverie.

"Of course, there are conditions. You must not be corpulent and bald, and covered with snuff; you must not be aged, white-headed and cross; you must not be fifty things that are obvious, but these excepted, you may almost anything provided you are distinguished and run after; women like fame; they worship masculine renown more than men do. Then what is a poor devil to do who can't declare his fame, such as it is?"

Mr. Dacre spoke this in a disjointed way, blowing out films of perfumed smoke in the intervals, and with the last sentence he threw the end of his cigarette out of the window and laughed sarcastically.

"And, yet, the moonlight is very pretty," he said, as he looked out again, once more passing to a new theme. "As good, very nearly, as anything they make in her Majesty's Theatre, for those happy fellows Don Giovanni or Don anything else. It sometimes makes a fellow almost spoony."

"Ah! yes; the moon—the moon—the lamp of the lovers, I never see it without

to feel some sentiment what you call romantic—eh!” said monsieur, leaning forward and smiling, and shrugging upward plaintively, and then a sigh. “Ah!”

“Come, monsieur, our emotions musn’t overcome us.”

“*N’atteste point sa lumière infidèle!*”

Monsieur shrugged, smiled, and sighed again.

“Ah! Monsieur,” replied Droqueville, “there are so many tender recollections and ideas. This is so beautiful moon, and—what you call?—*paysage—ces bois*—all these things recal so many circumstances of tender regret. These pistols, they do not to incommode your feet, I hope?” inquired Monsieur, as Dacre’s foot knocked on the case which they had so lately used.

“Many thanks no, Monsieur, I can quite understand you—

“*Dans ces bois, Lise en vain me jure  
Qu’elle m’aimera constamment ;  
O Bonheur ! ta douce imposture  
N’est que le rêve d’un moment ;*

*Et, comme aux loix du changement  
Tout est soumis dans la nature,  
Ces bois changeront de verdure,  
Et Lise changera d'amant."*

"Eh ! Monsieur, is not that very like it? however, let us dry our eyes and try another cigar."

So saying he offered his case, and monsieur with suitable acknowledgments accepted one, and offered his in return with a very animated description of its peculiarities and flavor, and so politely Mr. Dacre relieved himself of dialogue, and that cigar ended, broke again into rambling soliloquy.

"A very good plan is to make yourself a little bit mysterious, to pique curiosity—mother Eve fell by it; to make a confidence—a secret known only to you two—an excuse for whispers—a germ of sympathy—to undertake a service—danger, if by any means it can be had; and so always in her thoughts—always there; very dangerous, young ladies, is not it? Danger, ay, action and re-action; take care, Mr. Gillespie,



when you try that experiment, you don't run into some little danger yourself."

Mr. Gillespie uttered a grunt of contempt, shook the ashes from his cigar and smoked on.

"Excite their curiosity, their romance, penetrate feelings akin to gratitude, and inspire admiration by self-devotion. Is not that a gas lamp?"

Mr. Gillespie nodded gruffly.

"Old London town again, Monsieur Droqueville, how can I thank you?" said Dacre.

"By not to say one word of an obligation which is altogether mine; I have to thank Monsieur very much for the distinction of having been selected for a post so confidential."

"Where shall we set you down, sir?" asked Mr. Gillespie of the Frenchman.

He named his hotel.

"I wish, dear Droqueville, I could offer you any hospitality; but I am, as you know, a mere bird of passage here; and——"

"A thousand thanks; say not one word; I am going for half-an-hour to look into the theatre near this, where my compatriots play of vaudevilles; and Monsieur Gillespie, how shall we know how Monsieur Mannering recovers?"

"What for, do you want to know, sir?" answered Mr. Gillespie.

"It affects in some measure, sir, my safety, because I have taken part in the affair of this evening, and I should be compromised were Monsieur Mannering's indisposition, by misfortune, to end unhappily."

"A pretty hot kettle-o'-fish for us all, sir; I wish he may be spared, sir. I thought ye were confident on that head, sir—ye spoke as if ye were. I don't understand, sir. I don't know why ye should say all ye did if ye thought he was like to die, sir."

"But Monsieur is not a prophet, nor even a doctor," said Dacre.

"Well, I call ye both to witness I had neither act nor part in it; it is yer ain affair, gentlemen, I wash my hands o't."

"I hope they wont hang you by mistake,

Mr. Gillespie, it would be a very melancholy end for so cautious a gentleman," said Dacre.

"I'll take care they shan't, sir; deevelish gude care, sir," replied Mr. Gillespie.

"And in the interval you must make out how he is doing?" said Dacre.

"I'll hear that; I tauld them to let me know, though, except for gude-nature's sake, there's nae need I should care the snap o' my finger whether the fule lives or dees."

"Well, monsieur, Mr. Gillespie will do himself the honour to let you know punctually how Mr. Mannering does, and I'll let you know also," said Dacre.

Monsieur Droqueville was profuse in his acknowledgments.

A little out of their way they had to go, to knock up the honest gunsmith of whom Mr. Dacre had hired the pistols for a shooting match, for a wager of twenty pounds, as that circumstantial teller of a story informed him. Then they dropped Monsieur Droqueville at his hotel.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### MR. DACRE TAKES THE COMMAND.

THE driver came to the window.

"Where do you want to go?" asked Mr. Gillespie of his companion, with a surly and threatening countenance.

"To hell," said that gentleman, whose gayer levity seemed to have broken down altogether on the departure of their companion.

"Time enough, sir, for that; I'll tell him to drive to my door."

"The nearest entrance to the place I spoke of," said the young man with a dreary scoff.

Mr. Gillespie gave the man his order, and as soon as they were in motion, being himself in no pleasant temper, he said—

"Mr.—a—a—Dacre, yer no' that ceevil the night, sir."

"As *ceevil* as I wish to be," said Dacre.

"Verra *un-ceevil*, sir, and what's more, deevilish imprudent, sir; where's the gude in talkin' in that violent, daft fashion before people? Why, any fule would see ye were in a commotion o' mind, sir; that fellow that's driving us, he'll never believe it was an accident; he'll smell a rat, Mr. Dacre; he'll be conjecturing and talking, sir."

"And suspect you," said Dacre.

"Nothing o' the kind, sir; but I tell ye, Mr. Dacre, you had no business engaging in a thing o' that sort, no business in life, sir; ye tauld me ye wanted to conceeliate the young blockhead, when, in point o' fact, sir, ye only wanted to shoot him."

"We've had a charming day," said Dacre.

"And a bludey evening," added Gillespie.

"Yes, a bloody evening. Now, see, Mr. Gillespie, you are a clever man in your way, a clever usurer—don't mind the phrase—and you've made a fortune; but you'll leave the management of this affair to me;

you don't comprehend such mechanism ; nothing is done without a reason, not the least perfect move has been the occurrence of this evening, which seems to have frightened you half out of your wits."

"Well, if he dies, I conjecture ye'll be probably hanged, and a verra perfect move—out o' the world—it will prove ; and I'd like to know, in that case' what's been gained by it ; or even if 'twere no more than two years' imprisonment, I think it will be quite enough to knock your chances pretty well on the head. I didn't think ye capable, Mr. Dacre, of anything so eediotic."

Dacre smiled.

"Ye may laugh as ye will, Mr. Dacre ; ye may laugh now, but ye'll think shame o' yourself, when ye come to reflect, how ye've put everything in jeopardy, and other people besides yourself—and—and a'maist ruined all, sir, by this one night's wark."

Again the young gentleman smiled. It was not a pleasant smile ; his face was pale, and he looked as tired as if he had walked fifty miles fasting ; and the smile was but

momentary—nothing enjoying in the light that darkened so instantaneously into apathy.

“I did not think ye were one o’ those ranting fellows. What for should ye go to put yerself on a footing with these bleezing braggarts? Why, sir, if ye chanced to shoot him dead on the spot, it would ha’ been worse, a’maist, than if he had killed you.”

“You take a great interest in my safety, Mr. Gillespie,” said the young man, and smiled again.

“Tak’ an interest in your life, sir, and an interest in your prospects; ye’re a clever young man, sir—ye’re a clever young man, Mr. Dacre, but this night’s work—I’m clean bombazed wi’ it. Gad, sir, not a soul of us can tell how it will end; and I begin to think if you’re a madman, I’m a fule, the greater madman o’ the two, for trusting you; and I don’t know why we shouldn’t, t’ane and t’other, be locked up in Bedlam, instead o’ being treated like sane men.”

Dacre yawned.

“I see ye’re cast down about it yourself,” said Mr. Gillespie.

"By Jove, I'm no such thing—very much the contrary ; I brought it about with great tact and patience, and I would not have it undone for a thousand pounds. If there is any annoyance, it is something entirely different, and I mean to keep it to myself."

"If you like what you've done, you're easily pleased, sir," sneered Mr. Gillespie.

"I'm not easily pleased, and I do like it. Of course there's one blot—if he dies—but that won't happen, and I thank God, I shot him."

"I'm glad ye're so releegious, sir, and I wish I could be as easy about it as you are; and think o't how ye will, I consider it a breach o' faith wi' me, sir, and a d——d piece of nonsense beside."

Mr. Dacre yawned again.

"And a fine business it will be, sir, if all goes to the wall for this mad, lawless freak of yours," added Mr. Gillespie, with increasing energy.

"Do mind your own business," said Mr. Dacre, dryly ; "if you choose to back my



game, sir, you take me as I am—skill, judgment, everything; and rather than be bored any more with your stupid grumbling, I'd throw my cards in your face."

Mr. Dacre spoke with a sudden exasperation that had its evident effect upon Mr. Gillespie.

"See, there: what a pothor about nothing; why—a—Mr.—Mr.—a—Dacre, sir, it's more for your own sake than for mine, sir; of course we should both be injured, but you, Mr. Dacre, preencipally, 'twould touch you, may be, verra nearly, sir; and a' things conseedered, I think I may venture to put in a word now and again when I see a necessity; but ye'll understand, I'm verra far, sir, from meaning any offence, or wishing ye to suppose that I'm deesatisfied generally with the line ye have adopted, on the contrary, I'm verra weel pleased with it, and we'll hope all may end well."

Dacre had lighted a new cigarette on finishing his own speech, and was looking out of window, and smoking, as it seemed,

without hearing one word of Mr. Gillespie's complimentary address.

So silence succeeded until the carriage drew up at Mr. Gillespie's hall-door steps.

"It's four minutes past eleven, sir; ye'll do weel, Mr. Dacre, to come in; Mr. Larkin and Mr. Levi will be within, sir. I can't offer you any refreshment, but we can talk a bit, and conseeder what's best to be done in the emergency."

"No refreshments! how can you say so, with two such men as Mr. Larkin and Mr. Levi to charm us; d—n you, sir, do you take me for a fool, in right earnest, to suppose that I should go in here, to spend what remains of the night with two such arrant villains."

"Arrant villains! guide us! that's a very pointed expression, Mr. Dacre. Well, sir, they may be clever men, I'll no deny they're clever men, but as to villains, sir, they lead most regular lives, enough, sir; none o' yer ranting fules, wasting their substance on nonsense; they don't drink, sir, nor any o' them vices, to signify; and

they don't play, sir—none o' them follies, Mr. Dacre. No; they never play, except Mr. Levi, and that only when he stands sure to win. Oh, no sir, I can't allow *that*, unless all morality is confounded, sir, and that I'm to say I'm a villain myself. There's a line to be drawn somewhere, Mr. Dacre, and ye'll find those gentlemen at the right side o' it; they're clever, sir, but such language as that ye've applied to them, Mr. Dacre, is verra loose."

Mr. Dacre made no answer; he leaned back in the carriage as if he meant to pass the night in it.

"Open the door," said Mr. Gillespie to the driver, which order was obeyed, and he waited some seconds, but Mr. Dacre made no sign, and evidently was not getting out.

"We'll get down now, Mr. Dacre, if ye please; the hall door's open," said Gillespie, with cautious civility.

"I shan't get out, thanks."

"Wont ye come in and talk with the gentlemen, sir?" urged Mr. Gillespie.

"No," answered Dacre.

"Why—why—Mr. Dacre, sir? they're here at your desire," insisted the grim old gentleman, who was a great deal angrier than he cared to make known.

"They may go away at their own desire, sir," said Dacre, carelessly.

"Well, sir, ye'll do as ye think fit; but they'll hardly think it a usual way o' doing business," said Mr. Gillespie.

"A man's real business in life is to do what he likes best," said Dacre.

"Do let me persuade you, Mr. Dacre?"

"No."

"Well, and what will ye have them do?" demanded the old gentleman, commanding his temper with difficulty, in deference to Dacre's odd mood.

"Nothing," answered that impracticable young gentleman.

"Then I'm to tell them ye'll have them do nothing?"

"Yes, I'll let them wait; yes, Mr. Gillespie, there are limits to good-nature; I'm willing to be of use to you, but I'll not

worry myself a bit more than is necessary ; and now, listen. You shall let me know, at least twice a day exactly, how that pompous fellow, Mannering, is getting on ; if you fail, you'll find me unmanageable. You'll go down there yourself in the morning. I need not tell you that you're not to mention a word about me, nor to pretend that you know where I am. All the better if you give him a hint that I've gone to France with Droqueville ; but I leave that to your own invention."

"I'm scarce out o' the doctor's hands, Mr. Dacre ; the gout's not well out o' my knuckles yet. I'll be none the better o' this piece o' nonsense, and I'll hardly undertake to be jogging out to that d—d Silver Dragon again to-morrow morning."

"Mr. Gillespie, you *must* do as I say ; you'll find I'm in earnest."

"I'd better send up word to the gentlemen," said Mr. Gillespie, beckoning to the maid, who stood at the door.

"Drive away," shouted Dacre.

"Where, sir?" inquired the driver.

"Anywhere—toward the West-end," cried Dacre.

"Give my compliments to the gentlemen upstairs," shouted Gillespie, from the other window, to the servant at the door-steps; "and mind, ye tell them——"

But before he got further, distance made him inaudible; it was very trying to a gouty man.

## CHAPTER XX.

### NEWS FROM THE SILVER DRAGON.

"HERE comes Mr. Dacre. Come in; don't stand in the door, smiling, like an apparition," cried Mrs. Wardell, next evening, very glad to see that familiar face again at Guildford House.

"Like an apparition, I waited to be spoken to."

"Well, come in—do come in," said Mrs. Wardell.

"Yes, that completes it. I enter like that apparition. Who was he—I forget—who stood at the door, and was told to enter?"

"Mephistopheles," said a voice.

"Oh, thanks, Miss Gray. I'm flattered, though you may not have meant a compliment. I rather like that fiend; better, I'm afraid, than you do."

Miss Gray laughed a little as they shook hands.

"I had not an idea, Miss Gray, that you were in the room; that vase and those flowers hid you so completely. Yes, I think I do recollect Mephistopheles at Faust's study door, waiting at the threshold; but—but I hope you don't think me *very* like that unseasonable visitor?"

"Mysterious—satirical; yes, what more? Well, really I can't say."

"You laugh very unkindly."

"That's very true; for if you knew what has occurred, you would think it very unkind of me to laugh."

"Yes, indeed," supplemented Mrs. Wardell; "we have been so sorry and uneasy; you can't think——"

"Really? What can it be—what is it?" said Dacre.

"News—very unpleasant—of my cousin, Charles Mannering. He has been hurt—rather seriously from all I can learn—and we are very uncomfortable about him."

"Very sorry, indeed. Wasn't that Mr.



Mannering whom I met here the other evening?"

"Yes, the evening before last," said Laura.

"And what's the matter?"

"Rather a bad fall from his horse, I'm afraid," said Challys Gray.

"I once saw such a frightful accident," said good Mrs. Wardell, placing her fat hand before her eyes with a shudder; "a poor young man (a Captain Paulet) actually killed, so horribly, at a steeplechase. I never went to see one again, and I never shall."

"But, it's nothing so serious as to alarm, is it?" inquired Mr. Dacre.

"There was a note written at his dictation, by a Captain Transom, and signed with very tremulous initials by poor Charles; he made nothing of it, but it somehow frightened us. Didn't it, Julia?"

"Very much," said Mrs. Wardell; "there are always such concealments about such things; they are afraid to tell."

"And how do you know," asked Mr.

Dacre, "how it occurred? Riding you say?"

"Yes, he says so himself. Have you got the note about you, Julia?"

"Yes, here it is."

"Read what he says, like a darling."

She obeyed, and read as follows:—

"I am in a quiet little roadside inn, very comfortable. Riding here yesterday I had an ugly fall, and must keep quiet for a few days. My friend, Captain Transom, kindly acts as my amanuensis. I drop a line by post lest you should think me remiss. Pray keep a note of any commissions that can wait for a week or so, and when I am fit for duty once more, I will discharge the arrear. If you should see Ardenbroke, though that is not likely in so short a time, or any other friend, pray don't mention this. It is really nothing—only a little uncomfortable; and some of my friends might come down here bothering me."

"Where is he?" asked Dacre.

"He writes at the top 'The Silver Dragon,' and the post town," said Laura:

"Oh, the Silver Dragon; really?" and Mr. Dacre smiled a little oddly.

"Not a gambling house, I hope," exclaimed Mrs. Wardell.

"Well, they have what they call skittles there, and quoits, and bowling, and that kind of low gaming. No one goes there, or if one did, it would be for a lark; and I suppose our sober friend went there. He did not ride down at all; he drove. A friend of mine saw him going down with a Captain Transom. Depend upon it he got into a row, and some one gave him a very hard hit. A quiet little road-side inn! You have no idea how amusing that is. But, after all, what is a poor fellow to do who gets into a ridiculous scrape? I never tell an untruth myself, because I happen to hate it, having suffered from other people's contempt of truth; but poor Mr. Mannering"—here he laughed pleasantly—"of course he has coloured the affair a little."

"Charles used to tell the truth," said Laura.

"I dare say; I'm sure Mr. Mannering is

quite a champion of truth in Miss Laura Gray's presence. But we young fellows are sadly given to lying. I should lie myself were it not that other people's mendacity has disgusted me with the practice for my life. But I'm not hard upon poor fellows who have not contracted the same antipathy, and who speak the language of their kind."

"That's very good of you," said Mrs. Wardell; "you are a very good-natured moralist."

"Is not secrecy something of the nature of falsehood?" asked Miss Gray; perhaps she meant to show Mr. Dacre that he had something to excuse in himself.

"Silence is not falsehood, Miss Gray, and, on the contrary, is sometimes the very highest loyalty," said Mr. Dacre, sadly. "Concealment is not disguise."

"But to return to poor Charles Mannerling; you heard of him to-day?" asked Miss Gray.

"Yes; a friend mentioned him to-day, and had been down to the Silver Dragon

this morning to make inquiries, and it is quite true that he is hurt."

"Not seriously, I hope," inquired she, alarmed.

"Nothing of any consequence?" cried Mrs. Wardell at the same moment.

"Very trifling. My friend is slightly acquainted with him, and having heard that he was hurt, went down this morning to ask after him. He may have to stay there for a fortnight; but he said there is nothing to make one the least uneasy."

"But what is it?"

"You really must tell us," urged both ladies at once.

"Why do you suppose that I know anything more?" inquired Mr. Dacre.

"Because you do?" answered Mrs. Wardell, relying on intuition.

"I can't answer that, so I had better confess, particularly as Miss Gray condemns reserve so decidedly. You are quite right, Mrs. Wardell; I am informed of the entire affair. Mr. Mannering had been behaving a little oddly—very unlike himself; had

been listening to stories and circulating them, it seems, about another young man, who met him there, and gave him rather a rough lesson ; and the fall from his horse—horse he had none—turns out to have been a very hard knock of quite another kind.”

“ But not dangerous ? ” inquired Miss Gray, after a moment’s pause.

“ Not the least, my friend says, if he’ll only keep quiet—nothing—and the whole affair is supremely ridiculous.”

“ Well, it is very provoking, poor fellow ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Wardell ; “ and how soon shall we see him ? ”

“ In a fortnight,” said Dacre.

“ That’s a long time. Dear me, it must have been a very severe hurt,” said Mrs. Wardell.

“ The doctors regard it as a mere nothing, my informant tells me.”

“ Was he stabbed, or how was it ? ” inquired Julia Wardell, very uneasy.

“ Yes ; do say how it was,” urged Miss Gray.

"I believe I ought not to tell," he answered.

"I'm sure you'll tell us," she said.

"I'm sure I ought not to tell, Miss Gray; but the truth is I find it quite impossible to disobey you. See what a responsibility you charge yourself with in taking the command of a fellow-creature. Well, I ask but one condition; it is a secret. People might be seriously compromised if by any accident it got abroad."

"We'll not tell; we wont tell, Julia? Certainly not."

"No, not for the world," echoed the old lady.

"I dont think I ought," he said, coming over to Miss Gray; "I'm sure I oughtn't; but," and he lowered his voice, "you command, and you are absolute."

"You must not lower your voice, Mr. Dacre," said Mrs. Wardell; "I'm to hear it, all about it, as well as Laura. You must tell us how it was, and what he was hurt with."

"With a pistol bullet," replied Dacre.

"Oh, dear! how horrid!" exclaimed Miss Gray, very pale in a moment.

"Oh, mercy!" exclaimed Mrs. Wardell, "a pistol! then there has been a duel?"

"You are quite right—a duel; and from all I can learn," said Dacre, who did not quite like the signs of alarm, transient as they were, that showed themselves in Laura's face. "I hope Miss Gray will excuse my saying anything not quite in her kinsman's favour—I'm afraid it was very much Mr. Mannering's fault—altogether, indeed."

"I thought people never fought duels now," said Miss Gray.

"In extreme cases, extreme fools do still," said Dacre; "and from all I can hear, Mr. Mannering had left himself very open. There is a man against whom, it appears, he cherishes an unfriendly feeling, and he is said to have been hunting up gossip and old stories to his prejudice; watching his movements, and talking about him in a way that no one pretending to be a gentleman could bear. I'm telling you now what I have



heard. His hurt, I'm told, has turned out to be nothing, and so he lies by for a fortnight and meditates, and his little experience may be the means of keeping him out of a much worse scrape."

"And who is the person he quarrelled with," inquired Miss Gray.

"Well, that I really can't tell," said Mr. Dacre. "I don't mean to say I don't know; but I should break faith with two or three people if I were to whisper it anywhere."

Laura Challys Gray looked in his eyes inquiringly, and then down, with a little frown, in deep meditation.

"Are you sure it's nothing very bad?" inquired Mrs. Wardell, with new anxiety.

"Perfectly certain; I happened, as I told you, this afternoon, to meet a man who had just returned from a visit to his quarters in the country; he had seen him, and saw his doctor and Mr. Transom, also; and I went into particulars, thinking that if you had heard anything of the affair, it would be pleasant to you to hear also that the consequences were really so trifling."

"Very kind of you," said Mrs. Wardell.

"The only thing the doctor is really peremptory about, is that he shall see nobody ; he was quite angry with my friend when he found him there. So I would venture to recommend that you should send no one there ; he would be sure to have your messenger up to his room and talk ; but simply let him have a line by the post, and he can employ his secretary."

"Yes, so he can, without tiring himself," acquiesced the old lady.

"And, I'm afraid my news has been rather a damper, I'm so sorry. But you may rely entirely upon my bulletin ; and if you wish it, I'll make a point of seeing the same person every day, for he told me he meant to send or go down to that place every afternoon, and you shall hear exactly what he tells me."

"That's very kind of you," said Mrs. Wardell, "though I think the undertaking was addressed to Laura Gray."

"And, Miss Gray, may I sing a song for

you, and try to steal you away from your anxieties?"

Laura laughed.

"I'm not anxious now, although I should be if poor Charlie were in any danger. Of course I was a little shocked when I heard he had been actually engaged in a duel, but as it has ended so harmlessly, I should like very much indeed to hear a song."

Dacre smiled darkly on this beautiful girl for a moment, as if he was grateful for being permitted to obey her.

"What shall it be?"

"Anything."

He went to the piano, humming softly to himself, as singers will do, in aid of memory—sat down, and sang more divinely than ever.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### GOOD NIGHT.

YOUNG ladies, is there anything so dangerous as such a tenor, when the singer, especially, is so marvellously handsome as Alfred Dacre was? To such a voice it is given to awake those wild and tender feelings which mingle in all romance, in love, in sorrow, and in the yearnings of hope, and by a process so mysterious to steal into the heart, and open the fountain of our tears. Laura Gray sat near the window, looking out, and the enchantment of the music remained after it ceased, and she listened still, as it were, to the remembrance of it.

“I’m afraid I sang to inattentive ears,” said he, very low ; he had come to the window, and, leaning on the sash, spoke, look-

ing down upon her, she thought, with a sad smile.

“Mr. Dacre,” she said, “I am so much obliged; it was beautiful!”

She looked up smiling, with a dilated eye and pale cheek. What so delightfully flatters the vanity of man as seeing such evidences of emotion elicited by himself in a face so young and lovely.

Dacre smiled, he even laughed, and his small even teeth glimmered, and his dark eyes seemed to burn with a triumph almost insulting.

“The pride of this moment, Miss Gray, I shall never forget,” he almost whispered; and in the fervour of his words a deep soft crimson dyed her cheeks, her eyes dropped for a moment, but she quickly recovered herself.

“Pride? Why should there be such a feeling? all good music affects all people who have ears to hear, in like manner.”

“You wont understand me,” he said smiling, with a little shake of the head, and in a sad tone.

"I do; your words are quite clear, and that is my commentary."

"Do you believe in possession, Miss Gray?"

"A very cheerful question, Mr. Dacre."

"But do you?" he urged.

"Of course I believe it, and so must you, for it's in the Bible."

I don't know that Mr. Dacre quite admitted that logic. He was too well-bred, however, to dispute the authority to which Miss Gray bowed.

"Double identities, and all that," he resumed. "When you mean and don't mean—when you are quite in earnest, yet ridicule your own earnestness—when you admire and yet despise yourself—and perhaps love and also hate some other person."

"I have never been in that delightful state of confusion," says Miss Gray, with a laugh.

"I wish we were all as single-minded," he said. "As for me, I am sometimes legion—ever so many spirits in the same person! Don't you think it a very dangerous state:

a mutinous crew—the captain deposed—who can tell which among them will prove the more potent spirit, and what course the ship will steer; which reminds me that my course lies homeward now—two men on business that may interest you, to meet me; my hour has come.” All this was nearly in a whisper, and just at this moment a servant came in to announce to Mrs. Wardell the alarming intelligence respecting her dog who had been an invalid for two days—that Mrs. Medlicot thought there was something queer about his head and his left paw, and a sort of a shaking she did not understand.

“My dear, do you hear that?” she exclaimed, fussing up from her chair. “I knew, and no one would believe me, that it was serious. I knew it from the first,” and Mrs. Wardell got out of the room faster than she had moved for a week.

“Mr. Dacre, I have to ask one thing,” said Laura. “Do you think what has happened to Charles Mannering is in any way

connected with our pursuit of the odious people who wrote those letters?"

Mr. Dacre smiled.

"That question is an inspiration," he said. "Yes, I not only think, but I know, with absolute certainty, that what has occurred to Mr. Mannering is directly connected with those villanous machinations—how, I shall explain hereafter—I cannot do so now; but there is a mutual dependence between them of the most intimate kind, and, having said so much, I must there stop short for the present. Good night, Miss Gray."

"No, don't go, pray, for one moment. Do tell me how it is connected."

"That affair is the most intricate in the world. Ask me nothing for the present. You shall know everything by-and-by. I may tell you this, however, Mr. Mannering has been unconsciously committing the most serious stupidities. He was entangling himself in influences which he no more sees, and cannot, than those operations of nature,



which work, like the electric fluid, in secret, but which it is dangerous, and may be death itself, to encounter."

"Now—yes—that is precisely what I have been thinking. I shall leave this place to-morrow. I am involving others by remaining here, and I have no right, no claim, Mr. Dacre, to expose you any longer to the dangers which your kindness and generosity prompt you to incur for my sake."

Miss Laura Gray had risen with a look so high and spirited, that she might have represented a more beautiful Charlotte Corday in the moment of inspiration.

He looked at her with a smile of undisguised admiration.

"It is now my turn to entreat," said he. "If you withdraw before the crisis of the odious conspiracy which is directed against you, annoyance will pursue you wherever you go. I pledge myself within a week to place these villains on their knees and to extort a distinct confession of their guilt if only you remain where you are. If you, on the contrary, leave this place, you will by so

doing involve me in very serious danger, and yourself in protracted anxieties and alarms. If you think I have any claim on your consideration, I implore of you to prove it as I say."

"You say within a week, Mr. Dacre. You must in that case act with precipitation, and I don't know what danger such haste may involve. Your life has been in danger; Charles has also been in danger. I don't know what to think. I should much prefer incurring such annoyances as you apprehend for me, to risking the safety of kind friends who have been exerting themselves so generously, and I wont. I have quite made up my mind I will not; and Mr. Gryston can find a messenger to bring those papers I have to sign, or come himself, for here I will stay no longer."

"But, I assure you——"

"No; I've made up my mind. I should never forgive myself if I were to allow this to continue. I don't understand such people—they are so desperately wicked; but it's plain that if I remain here others may suffer.

There has been too much anxiety and danger already."

Mr. Dacre smiled, and his dark eyes seemed to gleam almost fiercely on her.

"Miss Gray, you overrate the danger—I despise it; but as that argument wont prevail, let me urge another. I implore of you to believe this ;—if you go just now you will involve me and perhaps others in very serious and urgent danger, and you will place me besides in a position the most painful that can be imagined. Only remain a very little longer and you will have ceased to have any disagreeable motive for going. Have I prevailed?"

"You, Mr. Dacre, are better entitled than any other person to advise me in this miserable business—you have taken more trouble. I will try a little longer as you think so, and we will see what a week may bring."

"I am very grateful," said Dacre.

"No; it is I who should thank you, but I wont go on saying that. We should only

have to repeat our pretty sayings over and over, and mine is true."

"Your commands I obey, and now, more than ever grateful, I say good-night."

"Good-night," said she.

In another minute he was driving away under the old trees. His odd, half-bitter smile had subsided. He looked back at the drawing-room window in which the light was shining. He wished to see her there, even her shadow; but a bough of a great tree hid the window, and he leaned back and said—

"Yes; it is a deep game, or—a *very* shallow one. This mechanism then is wound up—springs, wheels, levers—rather a nice piece of work. It must run on and down, and play its figures and strike the hours. By Heaven, I haven't thought for days; I never think now—my head swims and whirls so pleasantly. I hear, I see, I enjoy, but I never think. What a pretty creature she is—the prettiest creature in the world. It is a great pity."

## CHAPTER XXII.

### IN PRISON.

IN his dingy room, De Beaumirail looked ill and peevish. He had jerked away his novel, which lay sprawling, open leaved, upon the floor. The novelist had ventured, with a pompous emphasis, some moral platitudes which grated on the nerves of the recluse. "Conceited little Pharisee! And his book is as stupid as——" There was, of course, a simile. "What's this?"

Good old Mr. Parker, the clergyman, had forgotten, on making his last visit, that old-fashioned duodecimo, arrayed in clerical black, now somewhat rubbed and rusty, which made the tour of his parish, and was often opened in his daily visits, and lay ready always for duty in his ample coat pocket.

"That's old Parker's book," he said with a sour smile, as he plucked it towards him. "Comes here, I believe, to look after my soul! What a wild goose chase my wandering soul has led him! The Offices of the Church—isn't that what they call them? 'The Baptism of Infants'"—he was turning over the leaves listlessly.

"And I was baptized; and my godfathers and godmothers did promise and vow in my name that I should be an exemplary Christian and an ornament to society. Promise and vow! Good gossips, easier to promise and vow than to perform. I wonder how it fared with their own *conusors* (capital lawyer my affairs have made me—*conusors*, yes) and whether *they* did themselves what they promised for me. I'll answer for one of them — my distinguished godfather, old Brimmelstone. I'm afraid he left his own godfathers and godmothers to settle liabilities in his own case, and estreated his recognizances."

De Beaumirail shrugged and smiled coldly.

"A great sinner, and what's worse a screw, and might have been of use to me, and never was; but that's nothing remarkable."

He turned over some more leaves, and went on—" 'Visitation of the Sick.' Poor old Parker—every time he comes he has his book out, and fumbles with it and looks at me. It goes to my heart to refuse him the pleasure of reading it. Why don't I allow him? I know I ought; but the flesh is weak. If smoking was allowed, I think I should. Poor old fellow, he has not an idea where it is. 'The Burial of the Dead.' 'The Solemnization of Matrimony.'" De Beaumirail laughed.

" 'The Solemnization of Matrimony.' And a very solemn affair—for some of us, at least—whenever it comes."

There was a knock at his door just at this moment. De Beaumirail turned toward it, irresolute what answer to give. Probably old Mr. Parker come to reclaim his book. But no, it was too brisk a knock for that aged and timid hand.

"Which are worst," he thought—"my blue devils, or my devils incarnate? Sometimes one, sometimes the other. Enter, Satan in the flesh," he cried.

But the door was secured—he had forgotten that; and with the indolence of dejection hated being disturbed, and opened it rather bitterly.

There was the doctor, in a very rusty velveteen shooting coat, dingy tweed trousers, and battered slippers; a night-shirt buttoned at his throat, and a fez, whose tawdriness time and dust had long subdued, upon his head.

"Come in! I had no idea it was you. I thought it might have been my confessor—we'll shut the door, please—but you are the better *medicus* by so much as I am surer I have a body than a soul."

The doctor smiled drearily and looked about him slowly, as if he expected to find new pictures on the walls, or a gilded cornice; but it was only a way he had.

"Going upstairs to see that unfortunate fellow, Captain Prude. You know him?"



"No, I don't."

"Don't you? Why, he's only right over your head."

"There's a floor between, however," said De Beaumirail.

"Drinking himself to death, poor devil; and what's worse, his poor young wife," said the doctor. "Nothing but fluids in that room, sir. I don't think there's a pound of meat in a week."

The doctor was looking out of the window by this time with his hands in his pockets.

"And how are you getting on yourself," he said, turning about; "you look more lively to-day, don't you — how is the appetite?"

"Can't eat, sir, anything to signify."

"Let me see your tongue?"

"No, please; we'll not mind to-day," said De Beaumirail.

"Sleep?" said the doctor, after a yawn, shuffling back again to the table—"how is your sleep?"

"I don't sleep—I never was great at that," said De Beaumirail.

"You ought to look to your sleep, however—I don't like that," said the doctor.

"Nor I. I have palpitations, sir, that shake me up, and nasty dreams when I do snatch a doze."

"And that sort of sinking you describe, we give it a technical name, sir. It is well known to us, sir; it comes from monotony; and the air being always identical, the system grows low and languid."

"They have something to answer for who keep me here," said De Beaumirail.

"Did you look at your *Times* this morning. Some capital observations of that clever fellow, Flam, the member for—what's it's name—about imprisonment for debt; and, egad, sir, for a free country it's a burning stigma and a disgrace. Look at me, here ten years the fifth of last August. The *Applebury Herald*, sir, had an article on my treatment of an old man there; a case of asphyxia. I have it in my drawer. I'll read it for you, it might interest you, this evening—I'm in a hurry now to see the poor fellow upstairs."

“You read it for me last week—thanks.”

“Sooner or later, sir, that remnant of barbarism must be blotted from the statute book,” declared the doctor. “Here am I, sir—did you ever see my paper on the diseases of glass-blowers? I’ll read it for you the next time you allow me. I was complimented on that by two of the most eminent men in the profession to whom I sent copies. *The Probang and Forceps* was the only medical paper that did not speak well of it, and that was a personal feeling. I’d have been making my two or three thousand a year, and every farthing paid off by this time. It’s all very well saying I should give up my £50 a year—that’s all I have to subsist on—and come out; but that sort of sophistry wont hold water. Who’s that new fellow crossing the court with the gold-headed cane and the imperial? Don’t know, I suppose. This is his third day. Well, at all events—what was I saying?—I don’t suppose, sir, this remnant of barbarism can last much longer; unless we are to fall back and lose our place in the

race of nations. You have influential friends, Mr. de Beaumirail; why don't you poke them up. 'A long pull, and a strong pull, and a pull altogether,' you know, might take us out of this."

"I don't take a part in the discussion, because people are so stupid that they would suspect me of a prejudice, and any attempt to swell the chorus of eloquence, from this place, might make unfeeling people laugh."

"I shouldn't wonder," said the doctor. "Did you see two women, very odd looking dressed, black lace and yellow satin, they're in about a fortnight, they have only the one dress each, Spanish, or Portuguese, or something, they keep to themselves a good deal, expect to get out, I suppose. Old Jinks, the composer, thinks they're from the opera. They sing a lot in their room—devilish loud when the window's open. The eldest is a very fine woman, a little bit pale, you know."

And the doctor yawned, and sighed "heigh-ho!"

"Take some of that ether bottle when you find yourself getting down, you know," said the doctor. "There was a fellow from the music shop in Pall Mall with old Jenks this morning — that fellow makes a nice thing of his music, setting airs, and scores, and all that—and he expected to hear all about them. I'd have looked in on him only I was in a hurry to see how the Captain is getting on."

And the doctor, notwithstanding his haste, shuffled slowly about the room, and picked the novel off the floor and read the title, and looked round the walls again, and finally whistled for two or three minutes, looking out of the window, for in such cities of the dead, there is no hurry, and they seem to have an eternity at their disposal.

He was interrupted by a sound overhead, as of something falling, which, perhaps, recalled the Captain, for he turned about and said,—

"Well—anything more to say to me?" and being satisfied on this point, he took his

leave with an exhortation to De Beaumirail to keep his spirits up, and never say die, and then with another yawn, and the long-drawn "heigh-ho!" that had become habitual, he began to ascend the stairs at his leisure to the Captain.

When he was gone, De Beaumirail got up listlessly, and took for a while the doctor's place at the window, and looked out with his hands in the pockets of his dressing gown, and then after some time he saw, as he ruminated, Mr. Levi, the Jew, and Mr. Larkin, the Christian, crossing the court in conversation, as they approached his quarters.

Looking down upon them, with that kind of dislike, which the face betrays while looking upon an ugly reptile, Mr. de Beaumirail, in cold blood, I am sorry to say, cursed them both, very particularly, and then admitted them to his room, and heard all they had to say with the intense but odious interest with which an unscrupulous candidate may listen to the talk and suggestions of a pair of electioneering villains in his pay.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### MR. DACRE SEES A LETTER.

WHEN Mr. Dacre entered the drawing-room at Guildford House this evening, Mrs. Wardell was alone, and greeted him with her accustomed kindness.

“Laura will be down, I expect, in a minute or two. She was in her room writing a line to poor Charles Mannering.”

“Not telling him, is she, that he was hit with a pistol-bullet?” inquired Dacre, with an odd smile.

“No, we agreed that it would only vex him our knowing the nature of his accident, and, although nothing could be more reprehensible, yet it is not just yet the time to find fault.”

“Besides, you know, it would not do to let him know that I told you. He might

have another duel on his hands before he had well recovered the first," Dacre laughed; "and I fancy he has had quite enough of that kind of thing for the present."

"Oh, dear! no," said Mrs. Wardell; "that would be treating you very ill."

"Running my head into the lion's mouth," and Dacre smiled; "a formidable lion, no doubt, though a wounded one. The bulletin to-day, I'm glad to tell you, is quite satisfactory; no fever to signify, and no prescription but to keep quiet; in fact, he is a most fortunate patient. The luxurious importance of an invalid; the interest of a hero, and ample leisure to read his *Times*, and his novels, and to repent."

"The last I do hope," said Mrs. Wardell, accepting Dacre's speech in perfect good faith: "and we have had a very satisfactory communication also. We were thinking of driving down in a few days to that place, just to inquire. I think it would be kind, don't you? and show that we took an interest."



“Well, of course it would be kind; but there’s such a thing as killing people with kindness, and my friend tells me that none of his friends must call even at the door; so says the doctor.”

“Why he can’t mean that talking to the waiter at the door would kill Charles Man-nering up-stairs in his bedroom?” exclaimed Julia Wardell.

“That doesn’t exactly describe the process,” said Dacre, laughing. “What he says is this—for the same paradox struck me also—that it would be less likely to put him in a fever for people to go direct into his room, and talk to him half the day, than to excite and tantalize him by such calls; he’d be sure to hear of them, and he’d insist on seeing the people, and if the waiters disobeyed him, he’d blow them up, and get himself into such a nervous excitement, that mischief would inevitably follow.”

“Well, we only thought of it; but, perhaps, the doctor knows best,” said Mrs. Wardell, placing her fat, short fingers on some letters that lay on the table beside her,

and picking out one, which she presented to him, saying—"Just read that."

"Thank you," said Dacre, preparing to be bored with a long epistle from the Silver Dragon. It turned out, however, to be a totally different thing. Mrs. Wardell had addressed herself to converse with her dog, now happily recovering and occupying his cushion on the sofa beside her. The letter which Dacre had been invited to read, and which soon interested him intensely and disagreeably, was certainly not that which Mrs. Wardell had intended to give him.

It was in these terms, after a few lines of inquiry—

"You can't think how beautiful the scenery is here. As I write, I command a view so like some of the glimpses down the glens of the Apennines. I think if you were in this part of the world for a summer it would end in your building a castle, and becoming a lady of the Lake (by-the-by, such lakes! and I think those cold mists which stupid people complain of, so fine, so singular, and so effective a contrast, when

they rise and dissipate themselves—contrast, you understand, by way of preparation, to the noble colouring of these grand Caledonian landscapes). My paranthesis has run to such a length that you will let me off finishing the sentence. I like the people here so much. The peasantry so unaffectedly republican in tone and demeanour, and so feudal in their attachment. My host, you know, is *your* kinsman as well as mine. You would, I think, like him and his wife so much. She is not a beauty, and in so far does not resemble you. But in many ways she reminds me so of you, and this being so, I can't, of course, describe her, only, I know you would like her, and she would be charmed with you; and, therefore, if she asks you to Lochlinnir, I counsel you by all means to go. I wish I could say *come*. But I shall be in —shire a week before you could make up your mind. Therefore, I'm not selfish when I say *do* accept when she invites you, which, I know, she meditates. She means, also, to ask Mrs. Wardell to accompany you. She consulted me on the

subject, and asked whether you would come. I said, 'Yes.' Pray, don't disappoint and make me tell a fib. But my dear Challys, it strikes me, an excursion of this kind would be the very thing you would probably wish, for quite other reasons. Will you think me very impertinent? I am sure you wont—you have always listened to my advice so kindly. Recollect it shall be only advice; for, even if I had a right to blame, you are not the least to blame in this matter. I only venture a caution—shall I say a warning? There is an acquaintance I want you to drop. You must not allow Mr. Dacre to call at Guildford House any more; quietly say—not at home. It is only to repeat the exorcism half-a-dozen times, and that spirit is laid. I can't say more. My reasons are quite sufficient. When I am at liberty to state them you will *thank* me. I feel happier now that I have got that off my mind; and pray, dear Challys, don't contemn my warning."

Then came some gossip, and then this passage—

"I have had a letter from Charles Man-

nering, who has had an adventure, and got himself hurt somehow; but, he tells me, it will be nothing."

It ended with a word or two more, and the signature, "Ardenbroke;" and, smiling, Alfred Dacre returned it gently to its envelope, and while the old lady continued her talk with her dog, he slipped it among the two or three other letters on the table—still smiling.

He was smiling, while his heart swelled with wrath and bitterness.

"Well, that's very satisfactory, isn't it?" said good Mrs. Wardell, who had plainly mistaken the latter.

"He's sure to do well, as I said, if only he does as his doctor bids him."

"And I hope *you* have been quite well?" she said, suddenly observing how very pale he looked.

"I? Oh, I've been—yes, perfectly well, thank you," he said, in a rather bewildered way; "very well, thanks—a little—a little tired, I think—that's all—where is Miss Gray?"

"I told you she's writing a note; I think it must be finished by this time."

"Oh, I beg pardon; to be sure you did, and I have no business asking—I think I'm half asleep; I sat up nearly all last night over papers and accounts, and I really am little better than a somnambulist; a cup of your tea will, however, set me up again, and I shall be wide awake in a minute."

"I know the sensation so well; yes, indeed. Would you mind touching the bell? we shall have tea in a moment, and—here's Laura."

Laura received him very graciously this evening. She smiled more; her manner seemed also sadder and more subdued. Had she been crying? No; there were none of the unbecoming evidences of that feminine occupation. But did not her fine dark eyes look tearful? Could it be about that letter; and was she weak enough to adopt its advice?

She sat down at the piano, and, with one hand, ran lightly over the notes. With a dark and piercing gaze he looked unobserved

in her face. There was another feeling mingling in his anger, but he would not acknowledge it; it surprised, and almost alarmed him.

He drew near, and sat beside her at the piano.

“Miss Gray, I think—will you forgive me?—I think something has vexed you.”

She was looking down at the notes which she was touching lightly with one hand, and she said, without raising her eyes—

“Yes, I am vexed; very much vexed.”

“Not with me, I hope, Miss Gray,” he nearly whispered, but he looked very sad and uncertain.

“Certainly not; oh, Mr. Dacre! my true and brave friend, how could you think so?”

She spoke with a kind of enthusiasm that thrilled him, and, at the same time, extended her hand, which he took. His was very cold; he looked as pale as a dying man, and he gazed in her face with his eyes full of a

strange fire. Was it confusion—was it love—was it remorse? It was so intense she could not endure it. She felt a shudder in his hand; and, with a short sigh, like a gasp, he raised her hand to his lips, and passionately kissed it.

“What have I done? Forgive me, Miss Gray, I am very unhappy; I fancied you were—offended with me, and in the rapture of your acquittal, I forgot myself, and the immeasurable fate that separates us.”

She drew her hand back from him. He did not attempt to retain it. She had blushed intensely, but treated this stage act as the wildness of a moment. So estimating, it was, perhaps, more dignified to ignore it as she did.

“Not with you, but very much vexed with Ardenbroke and with Charles Man-  
nering.

“I’m sure you’ll forgive them,” said he.

“Well, I don’t know; I suppose I shall; but why do you say so?” she said.



"Because some people are so fortunate," he said, dejectedly.

"And others are so unfortunate?" she added.

"Yes, others are so unfortunate."

## CHAPTER XXIV.

“OH, COME TO ME WHEN DAYLIGHT SETS.”

A LITTLE silence followed these enigmatical speeches. She went on fiddling with the treble of an air, looking on her fingers. He stood beside her looking down upon her.

“I see, Miss Gray,” he said at last, “that you are a very good friend; I can be that—I could, at least, once. But I have found that people who are so, are also very steadfast enemies; I mean, I have found it so in myself. I have met many traitors; the world is full of simulated friendships and dissembled hatreds. I prefer a frank enemy to a flatterer. You never cherished an enmity; I have.”

“People have accused me of being vindictive; that is, not generally, but in one

particular case, and I never was ; but no one person quite understands another in this world."

"I was on the point of being very impertinent ; I was near asking a question," said he.

"Well?" she said, still looking down on the notes.

"I was going to ask in what particular case that was ; but I have no right, and I shan't venture."

He had chosen to interpret that "well?" as an invitation to put his question.

"No, you are right ; we shan't mind ; we'll not talk about it," answered she.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"And why sorry?" asked she.

"Because it interests me so much," said he.

"Well, it makes me sad, that is my only reason. I'm not afraid ; I'm never afraid of anything I do, but I am sorry whenever I think of that," she said.

"May I guess?" said he.

"Why?" she asked.

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"I want to know; I long to know."

"You are curious, then?"

"Very," said he.

"I thought that curiosity was a feminine grace, and that you men boasted of never being curious."

"Well, I shall ask but one question."

"I don't much mind, then, if I answer it. Go on, I'm listening."

"Is it, then, De Beaumirail?" he asked.

"Yes; how did you guess it?"

"Because you hinted the same thing once before, though not so distinctly; and you really, then, regret your not having liberated that odious fellow?" exclaimed Dacre. "I beg your pardon, but is not that a very misplaced remorse, Miss Gray?"

"It is well that we don't judge as harshly, always, as you men."

"Equally well, Miss Gray, that *we* don't always judge as mercifully as you—earth is no place for the angelic attributes—in this game that we call life; the diabolic carries all before it, the angels are nowhere. I don't speak in particular of De Beau-

mirail, though I don't take the indulgent view of his character that Ardenbroke does. But that, you will say, has something of malice in it; for no man living ever injured me so deeply as De Beaumirail. All I say is the general rule, you can't govern the world by kindness. Hell must be ruled with a strong hand, and so must the earth; the devils would swarm up, otherwise, and scale heaven."

"Didn't I hear you mention Mr. de Beaumirail?" inquired Mrs. Wardell, who had overheard the name.

"Yes; so I did," answered Dacre.

"And what do *you* think of him?" asked Mrs. Wardell; "of his appearance—his looks, I mean?"

"I never venture any such criticism in presence of ladies; they see with a truer eye. What is your opinion, Miss Gray?"

"I never saw him."

"Never say De Beaumirail? I thought you told me you *had* seen him; perhaps it was he who said he had seen you, and of course, in that case, the boast is not very

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likely to be true. I can only say, Mrs. Wardell, that I shall defer to your judgment in that matter, for I don't like him, and could not judge him fairly.”

“But I can't tell any more than Laura.”

“Why you must have seen him at Gray Forest, have not you? He told me he has been there.”

“So I think he was,” said Julia Wardell, “but never while I was there.”

“No, he was not very often there,” said Laura; “I believe about three times, and not for very long. I was in France, and never saw him there, nor anywhere else that I remember, and I don't care to hear about him; I mean, of course, what he is like. The whole subject is bitter to me, and I would give a year of my life that I dared set him free; but I can't, and my real helplessness, where I seem to have the sole power, is the most miserable reflection of my life.”

“What! really sorry you can't let that scamp loose upon the world?” said Dacre, with a little shrug and a smile. “I admire

the charity of your angelic sex, Miss Gray, but I do believe there is no way to its heart, like being a bit of a *mauvais sujet*. I envy De Beaumirail ; it is so pleasant, exciting a compassion on such easy terms. But our leaning is quite the other way. We don't take an interest in scamps ; their lives and motives are no mystery to us. Nothing awful or romantic about them ; simple selfishness, I mean a life of folly, and champagne, the dice-box, and the pistol, ending in broken fortunes and reputation, and liberty and light itself, *lost*."

"And how can you think that is not pitiable, Mr. Dacre ? The most pitiable of all miseries are those which overtake us from want of prudence, which seems to me so much the virtue of selfishness and hypocrisy."

I think Dacre rather liked this doctrine, at least it did not shock him, for he smiled darkly with pleasure, one would have said, as she enunciated it, while Mrs. Wardell, more orthodox, exclaimed—

"Laura, my dear, how can you ?"

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“I believe it is quite true,” said Dacre, laughing; “prudence is active fear, and active fear is cowardice; at the same time, I am happy to say that I have learned that kind of cowardice myself. De Beaumirail has taught me a lesson or two in it, so valuable, although he exacted a very high price for them, that I almost forgive him.”

“Is he as good-looking as people say?” asked Mrs. Wardell, recurring to her point.

The window was open, and the rich perfume of flowers exhaling in the sultry night, hung in the air. Laura Gray changed her place, and sat by the window, while Dacre, answering Mrs. Wardell, said—

“I could not describe him conscientiously; but I want very much to see him, and will, although he refused me that honour a few nights ago. Suppose I ask him for his *carte de visite* when he favours me with an interview? The fact really is, at least, in my case, that if I don't like a man I can't admire him, and De Beaumirail has hit me too often and too hard to allow me to like him; and, altogether, I am ashamed of him.”



Looking out in that luxurious atmosphere of fragrance, it was Laura's turn to smile now—what was her thought? Might it not be something like this?—

“Poor Charles Mannering can't say a good word of Mr. Dacre, and Mr. Dacre can't see anything good in Mr. de Beaumirail. How jealous they are, one of another; praise a man, and his sex are ready to tear him to pieces. They hate one to think, or fancy, any other man even good-looking.”

Laura was smiling silently from the window—not a satirical smile—a smile with that indefinable air of gratification and victory in it, which, in a beautiful and gracious face, has such a charm.

“Well, you must not mention me, Mr. Dacre; but I really am curious,” said Julia Wardell, “I have heard so much about him. There's an old clergyman, a Mr. Parker, who came here constantly to lecture Laura for not letting him out; and Mr. Gryston talks of him, and Ardenbroke, and Charles Mannering; and I've always heard him talked about in the Gray family; so, natu-

rally, I wish to see him. Shall we get his photo', Laura?"

"I'll manage it, if you tell me?" said Dacre, looking at Miss Gray.

"No, I should not wish it. Pray don't think of it," said Laura, her curiosity overcome by a kind of disgust.

"Are you serious?"

"Perfectly; I shouldn't like it."

"I'm sure you are curious?"

"So she is—very curious," interposed Julia Wardell.

"I should not look at it—nothing would pain me more. I don't like talking of him. I don't like thinking of him. He is suffering, and I am the passive instrument of his suffering. I pity him—I know how odious I must seem to others—and yet, from a feeling which I won't explain—I suppose you would laugh at me—a feeling that I can't explain—I am powerless. But I won't endure any jesting on the subject; it is so heartless, and it is cruel, besides, to me."

"What an empress she is!" exclaimed Julia Wardell.

"Empress, indeed," echoed Dacre, with a different meaning it seemed.

"Yes, about that very imperious," she continued. "I wish he would let me be of use to him—such use as I can—but he is so impracticable, and so angry with me, and can I wonder at his hating me? I assure you, Mr. Dacre, I could kneel at his feet to ask his forgiveness; and I know I am governed by a kind of madness, but I can't overcome it; and even talking of him makes me so miserably nervous. Julia Wardell, you ought to know it; and, Mr. Dacre, I implore of you to mention him no more."

Dacre looked at her with a strange curiosity.

"You can always command *me*, Miss Gray. I shall always do, or leave undone, precisely as you desire me."

"That's very kind of you, Mr. Dacre; but I should be very sorry to accept such a prerogative except in two or three things; and one"—she continued, with a little laugh—"unquestionably is your beautiful music."

"Certainly," said he, with alacrity unusual in singers, rising and approaching the piano; "only tell me what I shall sing. 'Something about the moon, I think,'" he glanced through the open window, through which he could see the broad moonlight spread like a hoarfrost over grass and leaves—and instantly touching the chords, with a little laugh he sang a few bars of Byron's early song:

"Oh, come to me when daylight sets,  
Sweet, then come to me,  
When smoothly glide our gondolets  
O'er the moonlit sea."

He stopped, and laughed again.

"You must forgive me—very impudent of me to sing such hackneyed music for Miss Gray, even in jest. But, seriously, order any song I can sing—I'm only too much honoured."

"And, seriously, I like that little Venetian song best of any. I feel the motion of the gondola as you sing. Of course, if it is not well sung, silence were better, but you

sing it with the true feeling. I know you have been in Venice, as I listen."

"I had no idea my little jest would end in such a success. I shall always think better of the song, and with a kind of gratitude."

## CHAPTER XXV.

### AN EVIL EYE.

So, without more fuss about it, he sang it through, and being encored by both ladies, he commenced it again. He was still singing, when Laura, who was sitting at the window, looking out, as she leaned on her hand and listened, rose suddenly, drawing back, with a shuddering "Oh!" as if she had seen something frightful.

"Shut the window—shut the door—downstairs, I mean."

Mr. Dacre had risen and approached, and even Mrs. Wardell had stood up, gazing with an alarmed curiosity on the young lady.

"What is it, Miss Gray?" he said, looking earnestly in her pale face.

"What's the matter, Laura dear? for

heaven's sake don't be foolish!" exclaimed Mrs. Wardell, with the peremptoriness of panic.

Dacre looked from the window, but saw nothing unusual.

"There's nothing there, I assure you," he said. "Pray tell me what I can do—I've shut the window as you desired."

"That dreadful little man—that horrible Jew," said Miss Gray.

"Where—where was he?" asked Dacre, eagerly looking again from the window.

"He came out suddenly from under one of the trees—from the shadow—and looked up at the window. I could not be mistaken."

Before she could interpose a word, Dacre had left the room. She saw him run down the steps, and, with a hasty glance round him, continue his course, bare-headed, down the avenue.

His carriage stood about half-way down. He passed it, and opened the gate, and made a survey up and down the narrow road. Then he returned slowly, looking

under and about the trees. They saw him stop and speak, it seemed, with the driver, and then slowly, and often looking about him, resume his way to the house.

"I'm very glad he did not overtake him," exclaimed Laura.

"But, my dear, what did you mean by saying a Jew? You don't know any Jews. Jews, indeed! What could you mean?" exclaimed Mrs. Wardell, who had been too much engrossed in watching Mr. Dacre's proceedings from the window, to put her question before.

"Yes, there is a Jewish face—one of the wickedest I could have imagined," said Laura, vehemently. "We saw it, at least I did, at the synagogue. I saw it here another night, looking in at the library window, and I now remember, what I could not recollect before, that I first saw that odious face among the people who came here the day after we arrived, to urge me to give that miserable Mr. de Beaumirail his liberty."

At this moment Mr. Dacre entered the room.



"Not a trace of him. I looked in all directions, the moment I got down. I asked at the gate. I inquired of the driver whether anyone had passed him, and there has been no one. Could it possibly have been fancy?"

"Quite impossible, I assure you. No, I saw him as distinctly as ever I saw anything in my life," said Laura Gray, very much troubled.

"But is he a dangerous person?" demanded Mrs. Wardell, proceeding to ring the bell vehemently.

"I can't tell, I'm sure," said Laura; "I can't describe the fear and loathing with which I see that man's face. Mr. Dacre, I forgot to ask, did you shut the hall-door?"

"Yes. Oh, yes; I'm quite sure."

"Don't you think, Mr. Dacre," said Laura Gray, "that it would be well to tell Mr. Gryston all about that man's prowling about this place, now that I remember him accurately; of course, we know who he is; his name, and everything about him; and Mr. Gryston would know what steps to take."

"Don't think of such a thing—pray don't," urged Mr. Dacre; "if you do, you defeat all my plans, and nothing could be more provoking; for I am on the point, as I told you, of success."

"Well, I don't know; I have a misgiving," said Laura Gray. "Why should we contend with those wicked people? I have a foreboding that something bad will come of it, if I don't give way; and after all, whatever you may think, I am persuaded it is only to leave this place, and I should never be pursued."

"Miss Gray, I *know* the reverse."

"Know it? How can you know it?" asked Challys Gray.

"Have you never read in that tiny romance, Lewis's 'Bravo of Venice,' how Flodoardo—I beg pardon for naming myself with so perfect a hero—associates, under the name of Abelino, with the assassins who hold the city in awe and enlists in the conspiracy against its government, for the purpose of delivering them all to the executioner? Now, my little counter-plot is near its crisis,

only don't disturb my operations, and do give me a few days more."

"What is all this about Venice and its conspirators?" asked Mrs. Wardell, a little perplexed. "I don't understand what on earth you mean."

Dacre laughed. He had been speaking a little inadvertently, and did not care to be more explicit to Mrs. Wardell.

"It is all taken from an old novel," said he. "But it is too long a story to ask you to listen to; besides, I don't remember it well enough, and, Miss Gray, I'm afraid you have been made very nervous. I only wish I could have secured that little wretch, but I'll find a way to reach him to-morrow morning."

"No, Mr. Dacre, I said before, you are not to be running into danger—you must not."

"You must give me a few days more—very few—if I fail, I fail, and so—good night."

And with these words Dacre took his departure. He raised his hat as he looked

up, and then swiftly disappeared under the shadow of the trees.

Dacre that night was in an odd mood. He felt as he fancied he never should have felt. In addition to that strange feeling, there were a dreadful agitation and gloom. He looked round him for a moment. The light from the drawing-room—the moonlight, and the trees—the very road under his feet, its dust mottled with patches of white moonlight and shadow, seemed unreal, like things seen in a vision. He stepped into his carriage, which began to drive away toward town.

When Dacre turned from the window, he saw in the opposite corner of the carriage a little figure in black *huddled* up in a cloak.

“Got in here, Mr. Dacre; changed my mind, sir,” said this person from his corner, in reply to a rough poke with Dacre’s foot.

“Ha! so I see, sir,” answered Dacre, “I had not expected this pleasure; you asked me to set you down at the gate, and you said you had business in some pot-house,

the Bell and Horns, or something like that, and that you meant to walk home, and walk home you shall."

He pulled the check-string, and brought the brougham to a standstill—"And what the devil did you mean by going to the front of the house, and staring up at the windows? Well for you I did not find you, I'd have beaten you to pieces, you little blackguard."

"Good at the fists?" (fishts he called them) said the Jew, serenely.

"Open that door," called Mr. Dacre, and opened accordingly it was.

"Now you get out and walk, or I'll make you," said he.

The Jew was a pugilist. Notwithstanding Mr. Dacre's stature, the little man at a glance knew that if he were uninitiated in "the science of self defence," he could, as he expressed it, "lick him into fits;" but there were very strong reasons for keeping the peace; and although the Jew flushed, and his great mouth looked ferocious, and his

prominent black eyes glared like fire, he controlled himself, and said—

“You might give a fellow a lift as far as Lees’s, in the Strand?”

The inquiring tone elicited no encouraging answer. Mr. Dacre said, more menacingly, “Get down, sir, or I’ll make you ; and mind, if you and your friends expect help from me, you must come to my rooms at eleven to-morrow morning, and do what I tell you ; and now, get out of this carriage, if you please.”

In this peremptory way was Mr. Levi set down, and the carriage drove away, leaving the Jew in a virulent temper, and a long walk to accomplish between the Bell and Horns, and Rees’s divan in the Strand.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

THE COUNTESS OF ARDENBROKE HAS A  
WORD TO SAY.

NEXT day old Lady Ardenbroke called at Guildford House. She was better, and came in, but did not venture to mount the stairs. She sat down in the library, and Laura Gray ran down and was really glad to see her.

The old lady kissed her, and mentally approved her looks. She thought she was looking even lovelier than when she saw her last. She was pleased with these brilliant looks, and drew nearer to her in spirit, and chatted kindly and smilingly, and looked in her face with pleased eyes as she answered—

“And, my dear, I have come partly to

tell you that I mean to worry you out of this horrid old house. I can't understand what you mean by shutting yourself up here."

"I like it—I really do."

"Now you shan't tell stories. You don't like it. What you mean is, that you came here thinking you should like it, just as foolish girls take the veil in a dream, with this difference, that your awaking has come earlier, and your folly is not irrevocable. I've come, however, with a resolution to make you act like a sane person, and take your proper place in the world."

"I'm not ambitious, auntie."

"And more shame for you. The idea of a creature like you shutting yourself up in this region of slumber, and milkmen, and humdrum, and vulgarity! If you ain't crazed already you soon will be, if you remain here. I'm an old woman, and I assure you I could not live here. Such gloom!—those frightful trees, and this clumsy house, and that road before your door, where nothing seems ever to pass ex-



cept my carriage, when my doctor allows me to make you a visit. It's fit, my dear Laura, for nothing but a madhouse or a nunnery."

"But it suits me. I'm half a lunatic, perhaps, and a half nun. I don't know," said Challys Gray, "I only know that I should dislike extremely the other kind of life into which one would be sure to be drawn, unless one were to dwell in this other unseen world, and hating that world so intensely, with me it is only a choice between Guildford House and a wandering life—as lonely, among towns and scenery of Spain and Italy, and perhaps of Palestine; and I think I'm out of spirits."

"You are brooding over that business of De Beaumirail?"

"Not so much as I ought, I dare say."

"Well, you know, if it troubles you keeping him locked up there, you can let him out whenever you please; and I think it would be much wiser, I confess, than making atonement by shutting yourself up in a prison."

Laura laughed.

"No, indeed, I'm not doing penance. If I were, I should be going to all manner of parties, kettledrums, and other tumultuous assemblies; but this quiet life is really the thing I like best."

"Well, it's contrary to nature, and there is only one way of accounting for it," said the old lady, fixing her still fine black eyes upon Laura with a kind of penetration that called, as it were, a dawning blush to her cheek. The old Countess shook her head significantly as she looked with a meaning smile, and was silent.

"There's no accounting for tastes, however," said Laura, rallying; "and all I can say is, that I have a decided taste for moping."

"I suspect, my dear, there is more in your contented solitude than you choose to say."

"I don't understand——"

"I mean, dear, in this seclusion, in your maiden meditation, you are not quite so fancy-free as a nun should be."

The blush that faintly showed itself just now, at these words, spread in a moment in a beautiful crimson flood, and conscious of the apparent self-betrayal, she felt very much vexed and disconcerted.

"Of course I blush just when I should not," she said, "and when there is absolutely no excuse on earth for blushing, except your looking so archly, and leaving me at the same time without the slightest clue to your meaning. There now, it's so provoking. You smile again and nod. Do tell me, darling, what it is you mean?"

"Why, my dear, I mean what I say. I mean there is nothing like a little romance for inducing a taste for solitude," said Lady Ardenbroke.

"And who ever fancied that I, of all people, was romantic, and who could one find in such a situation to play the part of hero?" pleaded Laura Gray, a little disdainfully.

"I'm sure it is not for me to say," said the old lady. "But why not your cousin, Charles Mannering?"

“Charles Mannering!” exclaimed Miss Gray.

“Yes, Charles Mannering, with his wounds and knight-errantry; you know as well as I do that he is madly in love with you.”

Relieved by the direction of Lady Ardenbroke’s attack, it yet embarrassed her extremely; for the occurrence of only a week or so before instantly presented itself to her mind, and she gazed for some seconds into her old relative’s face confounded and without a word to say.

“Upon my word, for a young lady so entirely proof against such weaknesses, you do blush wonderfully like a guilty person.”

And at those words the old lady smiled again provokingly.

“You are quite mistaken, dear auntie; never were more mistaken in your life. I assure you there is nothing of the kind, and I don’t know anything that would vex me more than its being supposed, except, indeed, there being any—the slightest—foundation for it.”

“Well, I see nothing to be ashamed of,

if it were so," said Lady Ardenbroke. "He's very amiable, and Ardenbroke says he's clever; and you know he's not by any means a lackland, he'll have three or four thousand a year."

"Now you *must* believe me; there is nothing of that kind. We are very good friends, but any idea of that sort would quite put an end to our pleasant relations, and leave me, for the present at least, very destitute of friends. Do you believe me?"

"I'm sure, at least, you always intend to tell truths, and I'll not dispute it now, Laura; and I do think you ought to do a great deal better than Charles Mannering. There's Ardenbroke. No, dear, you need not laugh. I know you are first cousins, and that ends it; but I should be very glad indeed, if Ardenbroke were to marry half as well, and the moral what of I say is just this—if you had only one twentieth the ambition that you have got beauty, cleverness, and fortune, you might do anything."

"And when does Ardenbroke come back," asked Laura Gray, after a little laugh.

"He doesn't say; but he sends all kinds of messages to you, and I've forgotten his letter, but he told me particularly to call and see you, and, in short, he speaks of your convent life just as I do, and, indeed, as every person of sense, except yourself, must do."

Laura recollected a passage in the letter she had received only a few days before from Lord Ardenbroke, the same which blundering Mrs. Wardell had placed instead of quite another in Alfred Dacre's hands. Of this mistake, indeed, the young lady knew nothing. If she had, she would, I dare say, have been very uncomfortable indeed.

"I had a note from him—a letter," said Laura. "He seems to like his Scotch friends so much."

Laura felt a little uncomfortably. That sentence or two about Alfred Dacre weighed upon her like a secret, and for the world

she would not have mentioned it to Lady Ardenbroke. Had the absent peer written to his mother in the same sense, and had she paid her visit at Guildford House expressly for the purpose of giving her some advice?

Laura Gray was preparing herself for debate, not of a pleasant kind for a person as true as she was. In her nervous state of expectation, she had got up and stood settling some flowers in a vase that stood upon the table. I think she was glad that she had thought of that occupation, when the old countess said—

“And Ardenbroke has made me so curious; he says an old acquaintance of mine, as well as his, has turned up in London. He speaks of him as if in some kind of alarm, and says he hopes his visit may not be attended with trouble to any of our relations. I have written to him asking him all kinds of questions, and I have been puzzling my old head over his sentences ever since his letter came. Didn't you mention something about a Mr.

Dacre—I've been thinking he may be the person—didn't you?"

"I—I asked you about that family, but I'm not sure that I mentioned any one in particular—did I?" said Laura Gray, quite honestly, still settling the flowers, and looking more narrowly into them.

"I thought you did, but I'm not sure. Do you know any one of that name?"

Had Ardenbroke sent her to learn how matters really stood?

"Yes, I do know a Mr. Dacre," she said, standing upright and preparing to be offended.

But old Lady Ardenbroke's face betrayed no symptom of that sort of craft or suspicion which Laura had for a moment apprehended.

"I was not quite certain; but possibly some Mr. Dacre is the person; they are connected with us, and it was floating in my mind. A very pretty young man Alfred Dacre was, but not a safe companion, I thought, for Ardenbroke, and I was very



glad when he went away. What is the name of your acquaintance?"

"Alfred—*Alfred* Dacre," said Laura Gray, with an effort.

"Oh! really? I suppose it is the same. He is a kind of cousin of Ardenbroke's. I think he was quarrelsome. I heard of his fighting two duels in France, and when he and Ardenbroke, who is, you know, the most good-natured creature on earth, were together in Paris, he contrived to get him into a scrape of the same kind; it certainly was he, and it was simply the mercy of God that saved him, for the man he fought with was a professed duellist—a Count Droqueville—who ruined himself afterwards, I heard, at play; and I have been quite uneasy ever since Ardenbroke's letter reached me lest that *vaut-rien*, Mr. Dacre, should have turned up again; for I need not say how objectionable a companion I thought him, and, to say truth, it was one reason of my calling here to-day. I wonder whether it is the same. What is he like?"

This was a difficult question for Miss

Gray, and, after a momentary puzzle, she said—

“It is so hard to give a general description. Wouldn't it be better if you were to ask me any questions that strike you?”

“I think Alfred Dacre, if he is alive, but I'm nearly certain I heard he was dead, would be about five-and-thirty now. Does he look that?” inquired the old lady.

“No; certainly not; not, I think, quite thirty,” said Laura.

“Thirty—and five—and three,” said Lady Ardenbroke, reflectively, touching the tips of her fingers. “I really think he must be at least thirty-eight.”

“Then that point is quite settled, for I don't think he can possibly be more than I said,” Laura answered, with a kind of relief. But recollecting that old Lady Ardenbroke was not always infallible in the matter of figures, on reflection, she added, “Perhaps when you write it would be as well to ask Ardenbroke directly whether he does mean Mr. Alfred Dacre, and, if so, where Mr. Dacre is at present in London,

and what he is doing. That is, I mean if your anxiety is caused by your apprehension that he does mean that particular Mr. Dacre?"

"I think I will, dear, for it does make me *very* uncomfortable."

And with these words the old lady took her leave, and Laura Gray, standing at the library window, ruminated and unpleasantly connected the jumbled recollections of the old countess with the warning conveyed in such decided terms in the letter she had so lately received from Lord Ardenbroke.

"I wonder why he stays so long away, or why he does not speak more plainly. As to offending people who have been so kind to me, simply because others don't like them, and wont say why, I'll never do that—he has been so good-natured in this unpleasant business, and so zealous without making the least fuss about it, and then really a little music is such a pleasure in our lonely life—and such music—and what monsters we should appear, what stupidity, and caprice, and positive ingratitude. If

people want to make me do such things, at least they must condescend to give me a reason for it."

"I met Lady Ardenbroke on the steps," said fat Mrs. Wardell, entering; "how miserably thin she looks! Any news of Ardenbroke, or anything? Poor old soul, I did not like to delay her a moment, she did look so tired."

And so, Julia Wardell untied her bonnet-strings, and sat down to hear the news which, as we know, was not much.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### DESULTORY.

IN the evening, I should say the early night, that much suspected, wayward, handsome Alfred Dacre was, as usual, approaching Guildford House in his carriage.

In certain states of fancy and feeling how interesting a scene the most commonplace and homely will grow. Where is the old fellow of fifty for whom some bit of woodland, some quiet road, some drowsy landscape, which other eyes scarcely look at, much less read, has not an inner meaning, sad and sweet. The sun shines tenderly there, the air breathes over it like a sigh ; the wall-flower and woodbine are fragrant with a perfume they know nowhere else. It is dreamland, an early romance lived and died

there, and all is beautiful and sweet, and musical, in its melancholy haunt.

This kind of interest to endure as long as memory itself, was Dacre half unconsciously founding for himself. These trees and houses which night after night he had passed on the same route, had gradually acquired a friendly and romantic air, and he was growing to love them.

These visits to Guildford House—would not his life be dull without them? Could he quite define the feelings with which he returned there night after night? Not easily. They were so complex—odd—yet on the whole exciting—delightful.

There was one very unpleasant image, however, which every now and then recurred. It was that of Ardenbroke. Sometimes at his desk writing a letter, sometimes suddenly recalled to town, and talking earnestly with Laura Gray, in the drawing-room of Guildford House.

“There’s no use on earth in writing to him,” thought he. “But when my friend

Ardenbroke comes to town he and I shall talk a little."

He thought he could understand Miss Gray's marked welcome. He had read Ardenbroke's letter, and felt that the kindness of her greeting was a recoil against something like dictation.

It was generous. It might last for a time, but it was not to be relied on.

"When does Ardenbroke come to town?" he asked.

"From all I can learn I fancy not sooner than a month," she answered.

"Oh," said he; and he thought a good deal might be done in a month.

"We were speaking of Mr. de Beaumirail the other night—do you recollect?" said she.

"Dear me! Has he been giving you any more trouble?" asked Dacre, eagerly.

"Not directly, but through that good old man, Mr. Parker, whom I can't refuse to listen to," she answered.

"Not refuse?—why, to be sure you can. Pray forgive me," said he, "but it does

seem to me a pity, I think, that you should be so easily moved by such appeals. What business has that old man, when once you have acquainted him with your decision, to go on teasing you? I believe he's a good old man, but he has no right on earth to annoy you with his importunities. Isn't he growing positively impertinent?"

"I think you took his part a little time ago, when I was impatient," said Laura.

"Did I? Well, that was before you honoured me with a commission which it was impossible to hold, and not to feel a very absorbing interest in your tranquillity," he replied. "That old man is—I have not seen him for years, I think, but I know a good deal of him—he's officious, he's extremely troublesome, he's the worst kind of bore—a bore on the highest principles, who thinks it his duty to bore you, and consequently is quite above the laws of either compassion or fatigue."

"He is, I think, very good and simple," said Laura, with a grave decision.

"I should almost fancy, Miss Gray, from



your liking for his ambassador, that you had begun to feel an interest in De Beaumirail," said Alfred Dacre.

"An interest—I don't quite see."

"Well, that is not quite what I mean. What I do conjecture is, that your feelings have become mitigated, and that you are, in secret, more favourably disposed——"

"No; there is nothing of the kind," interrupted Miss Gray.

"No relenting?" he continued.

"I can't make myself clear. There is a personal feeling—but not revenge—there are circumstances which have fixed in my mind respecting him an insurmountable disgust."

"With respect to a person you never saw?" exclaimed Mr. Dacre.

"Whom I never saw—but whom I know to be the incarnation of cruelty and perfidy," she said, with an almost whispered vehemence.

"Oh! One learns as one gets on. There is a great deal I have reason to resent in De Beaumirail, and which I do

resent, as I think he knows. But you say perfidy and cruelty; well, that is a new light upon his character—so far as I fancied I knew it. I think it will rather surprise Ardenbroke also.”

“Yes; Ardenbroke, and Charles Manner-  
ing, and you. Men have a way of estimat-  
ing character which is peculiar to them-  
selves; but it is not mine, nor at all like  
it,” said Miss Gray.

“From which I conjecture that Arden-  
broke does *not* think him cruel or per-  
fidious?” said Dacre.

“I don’t blame you, because you don’t  
know the facts,” answered she.

“I don’t see, quite, those things in his  
character, that is, in a greater degree  
than we find them in the odious average of  
human nature; but I do see no end of bad  
traits there, at least what we men consider  
bad.”

“I should really be glad to know what  
you do consider bad,” said Laura. “No ill-  
usage of us poor women ever comes under  
that category, and even murder, as in the

It is not easily gotten, but I think I should describe a morally bad action to be any action of another person's which is attended with serious inconvenience to myself," said Dacre.

"Now that is so like you, Mr. Dacre; you can never be serious for a moment," remarked Laura Gray.

"On the contrary, there is no creature in this great religious and wicked city more serious than I. Don't you know that levity is a sign of suffering, and that laughter is one of the attendants of madness? Besides, what I said was in no merely frivolous mood. You will find its spirit in the moral code of all men. *I* have, at least." He accompanied this defence with one of his dubious smiles, and then, darkening, he sighed profoundly.

"*That*," he resumed, "has been very like my code. That which right or wrong has borne hard upon my interests, I have re-

sented. But, perhaps, we are all a little too hard upon De Beaumirail. If Ardenbroke says so, you may be pretty certain of it, for his infirmity is to form harsh judgments upon slender grounds; and he once said to me, 'for all I'm worth I would not see you married to a woman in whose happiness I felt an interest.' 'Why?' I asked, you may suppose, a little surprised, for we were at that time very intimate friends indeed. 'Because,' he answered, 'you are too severe a judge;' and, to this hour, he holds the same opinion. I can't help it, and I believe it does not hurt me very much, for I am not likely ever to find a human being care enough for me to make me her willing slave. A slave, indeed, I might be—that is possible, only too possible.

'O she is dearer to my soul than rest.'

Labour, danger, death, for the sake of one enchantress, would be welcome—and I such a martyr—such a fool!"

With a smile a little bitter and very melancholy, he rose and walked a few steps to a vase of flowers, which stood on the

window-stone, and looked at the blossoms, as if he were reading their meaning in his reverie.

How was it that, as she leaned pensively on her hand in silence, scarcely breathing, those odd words, like music in a dream, trembled in her ears with a strange delight.

END OF VOL. II.

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